

The First of His Kind

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The First of His Kind

by [HigherMagic](#)

Summary

"Jack tells me you attacked one of the first responders," Hannibal says. Will growls, and Hannibal watches as one corner of his mouth twitches upwards. "You tried to rip his throat out." Will makes another low sound. This time, he's definitely smiling, in the same way a wolf does right before it lunges. Hannibal smiles back.

Notes

God help me ANOTHER WIP.

This fic hit me outta nowhere and I had to write it because ABO Hannigram is my jam. It's going to go quickly down the path of psychological and physical torture and manipulation, as well as all the delightful influence that the ABO 'verse has to offer. The story will become explicit.....very soon.

I hope you guys like it!

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [The First of His Kind](#) by [micchi](#)

Chapter 1

Hannibal has always strived to maintain a strict schedule in regards to his appointments. He works during very specific hours of each day and does not accept walk-ins. Recently, it has become even more restricted to referrals since his involvement with the FBI has increased.

Even with these new consultations clogging up his time, Hannibal schedules his clients and appointments so that Thursday afternoon is always free. This is especially prudent when he plans on his extravagant dinner parties. The Thursday and Friday leading up to such a night is the most important, and ensures that everything is prepared so that guests are not exposed to the less savory side of fine dining.

So, it is aggravating to see Jack's name flash across his phone as he's closing up his office, at two p.m. on a Thursday afternoon in early January. The cold is biting and the wind chill is so bad that people are being warned about the risk of frostbite on exposed skin after thirty minutes outside. Hannibal likes this time of year to hunt, contrary to what others might advise – those that do brave the cold, in times like this, are often sturdy.

"Hello, Jack," he says, hoping to maintain a pleasant demeanor. It is important to keep a good relationship with the people that would do him the most harm. Jack is shrewd, just the wrong kind of suspicious.

"Doctor Lecter, I hope I'm not interrupting," Jack replies. His voice sounds strained and muffled, like he has his hand cupped over the phone. Hannibal crosses the sidewalk and heads to his vehicle, which is parked under a small awning so that his windshield doesn't catch any snow.

Hannibal slides his hand into his pocket and the car chirps as it unlocks, and then starts with a soft, chittering rumble from the remote. Hannibal ducks back inside of his office while he waits for his car to warm up. It wouldn't do to comprise his hands in the cold if this conversation carries on too long.

"I was just leaving the office. You're not interrupting. How may I help you?"

"I -. Was wondering. You wouldn't happen to have any Neutral injections at your office, would you?"

Hannibal pauses, straightening up. His reflection catches his eye, challenging, a flash of red passing through his eye like the hi-beams of an oncoming car, before it's gone. "Yes," he replies after a moment. "I believe I do. Where are you?"

"I'll text you the address. Please be here as soon as you can," Jack says, and Hannibal hangs up and enters his office. There is a second room, where he stores refrigerated medication that he prescribes. Among these things, among the adrenaline shots and ephedrine and anti-psychotics and sedatives, are the Neutral shots.

His phone chimes as he takes a few of the preloaded syringes – Neutral, like epi-pens, usually come as one-shot spring-loaded items – and he sees that Jack has texted him the address of a hotel on the North side of Annapolis.

Once he has the syringes loaded in his bag, he exits his office, locking the door behind him, and goes to his now-pleasantly warm car. The whirr of the engine is the only noise as he pulls out onto the salt-white streets and heads East.

Thanks to the cold, there are not many people on the road, and Hannibal arrives at the hotel location within half an hour. There are several police cars gathered around, their blue and red lights reflecting garishly in the windows and on the snow still clinging stubbornly to the sidewalk.

There is an ambulance, but it looks like it is already on the way to packing up and leaving. There are three black FBI trucks – one, Hannibal recognizes, is for the coroner to move the body. The other two are the standard, official SUVs.

He parks next to one of the police cars, near the line of yellow tape, and gets out of the car.

Almost immediately, a sharp scent hits his nose hard enough that he stumbles. His keen sense of smell has always been a double-edged sword but now it feels like a curse. The stench of blood and meat is, as always, present, but other than that, pervading the air and making it hard to concentrate, is something else entirely. It's sharp, cutting, and smells almost like a rutting Alpha except if that was the case there would definitely be more panic showing in the faces of the agents and forensic experts gathered.

He spies Jack by the ambulance and walks over, his bag in hand. The wind is not as bad here but still bites at Hannibal's cheekbones and around his eyes where his hair and his scarf do not protect him. Jack is shivering, rubbing his thickly-gloved hands together, and gives him a nod of greeting as he approaches.

"Doctor Lecter, thank you for coming," he says. "Did you bring it?"

"Yes," Hannibal replies, tapping on his bag. Now that he is closer to the building itself, the smell has gotten stronger, but changed in tone. Like adding red to a color already purple, it's warming and mellowing from the cool feeling before. He resists the urge to lower his scarf so he can scent the air. "What's going on?"

"Come inside," Jack says, and gestures for him to enter the hotel. Hannibal nods and follows. There is another line of tape around the entrance and they duck under it and enter the hotel. Hannibal sees the large bloodstain on the floor and cocks his head to one side.

"Another visit from the Ripper?" he asks mildly, looking around. There is no body remaining, so the crew standing around are sparse, mostly photographers. Hannibal catches Beverly's

eye as she's gathering a sample of dirt from a footprint on the floor and gives her a polite nod of greeting.

"Hard to say, so far," Jack says. Now that they're indoors, the natural flush of heat is making the layers almost unbearable. Hannibal sets his bag down and slides off his scarf and gloves, folding them neatly and putting them in a pocket each. "That's not why I called you here."

"No, I hardly think your dead man is rutting," Hannibal says. Neutral is a fairly new drug, only becoming common use in hospitals and emergency response teams within the last five years. It works similarly to a sedative, but is specifically engineered to release neutralizing chemicals in Alphas to calm them down from the mental effects of a rut. It is the answering hormone that Omegas produce when in heat, and provides the same satisfaction an Alpha might get from knotting an Omega, rendering them calm enough to move or contain as necessary.

Jack huffs. "No." He shakes his head and sighs, eyeing the bloodstain. "Not the dead man."

Hannibal looks around again, the corners of his mouth tugging in displeasure before he schools his expression. "Who am I here for, Jack?" he asks.

Jack's mouth twists. His eyes are threaded with red and his scent is sour with worry. "Will," he says.

Hannibal can't stop the blink of shock. "I...am confused," he says, attempting to keep his voice mild. "Will is an Omega. By that extension he is physically incapable of rutting."

"I know," Jack says. "But he is."

Hannibal presses his lips together and sighs through his nose. "Bring me to him."

Jack nods and leads the way towards the reception desk at the front of the hotel. As they pass, Hannibal smells the low roll of anxiety from the Alphas gathered. He meets Beverly's eyes again and she shakes her head, looking back down. Clearly, whatever happened, it is enough to put all of them ill at ease.

They pass into a hallway leading to the elevators and gym, and Hannibal stops when he smells it. It is the same scent from outside, bitter and sharp, dark chocolate and lemons. He recognizes it immediately as Will's, but perverted. Will smells uniquely like the wild, mint and water and lemongrass and, of course, his dogs. It is not uncommon for Omegas to keep pets, especially when they live alone.

But something has changed in his scent, when Hannibal tilts his chin up and scents the air. He opens his mouth, lets the flavor of Will soak onto his palette, and follows Jack down the hallway towards the gym. The doors and wall are glass so Hannibal can see right into it.

He spots Will immediately. He's trembling, soaked to the bone in sweat despite the fact that it's cool in this hallway and he's only wearing jeans, boots, and a t-shirt. His hair is flat and dark against his face, his clothes black with stains. Despite this, he is not flushed, but pale and clammy-looking.

He jerks and opens his eyes, finding Jack and Hannibal, and he bares his teeth. He's sitting on the floor behind a treadmill and when he tries to move, to lunge at them, his arm gets caught. He's been handcuffed to a hot water pipe at ground level, leading to the sauna.

Hannibal wants to growl. Throughout his life, his excellent sense of smell, his status, and his *hobbies* have honed his opinion as a prime Alpha to a fine point that a needle would be proud of. And, as a lot of Alphas are unfortunately prone to do, he knows that during their therapy sessions he has bonded himself in some way, however small, to Will. He is possessive of Will, he understands that about himself.

The fact that Jack so cavalierly treats his possessions like feral animals brings up thoughts of how he'd slow-roast Jack and feed him piece by piece to Will and Bella.

Will's eyes are bright and gold, driven entirely by his id as Omegas in heat and Alphas in rut are prone to do. He is pulling on the handcuffs, snarling at both of them, clawing at the rotating surface of the treadmill and peeling it from its platform.

Hannibal tuts, folding his hands in front of him. "Now I've seen everything," he says. Jack hums, the joke eliciting no reaction from his eyes or mouth. "How long has he been like this?"

"Almost an hour," Jack replies. Hannibal swallows back a sound of concern. The amount of aggressive chemicals stirring in a brain as special as Will's for so long might render it as useful as soup. Will is too reactive, too sensitive to people's hormones and thoughts.

"Do you know what triggered it?"

Jack shrugs. "I wasn't with him," he says. "I cleared the room, was lettin' him do his thing, you know. Then I heard him howling and I ran back inside. He attacked one of the EMTs. Almost ripped his throat out."

Hannibal turns to regard Jack, lips pursing as he thinks. "Perhaps there was something about this murder that triggered his fight or flight reflex. An Omega's is...particularly delicate."

"You're tellin' me," Jack mutters. He looks down at Hannibal's bag and nods to it. "You think it'll help? I didn't know what else to do. There's nothing to stop this for Omegas."

Hannibal nods. Omegas have suppressants, which prevent unwanted heats, so there has been no major drug released to stop one from happening once it starts. Conversely, since only Alphas who have created a pair bond with an Omega go into rut, there are medications to prevent one from happening in an inopportune place, but nothing for suppression.

"I suppose it will be an experiment all round," he says, smiling. Jack nods. "I think it would be best if only I were to go in there. We don't want to crowd him."

"Do you think that's wise? He might be Omega but he has teeth all the same."

"He's handcuffed and I don't need to be near his teeth to administer the medication," Hannibal replies lightly. "Besides, I trust you to save my throat if he decides to bite."

Jack scoffs, clearly not finding nearly as much delight in this as Hannibal is, and with another smile, Hannibal pushes on the door to the gym and enters the room. The air here is cool but humid, and Will's sharp scent is almost overwhelming. The normal crispness of his scent, marking him as Omega, has not been lost, but corrupted somehow, like poison does to meat. Hannibal does not like this scent on Will in the slightest.

Will snarls at him, slithering back and putting himself on the balls of his feet, one hand tucked behind the pipe and turning his knuckles pink from the heat. His other hand is curled, nails ready to rip and tear, and digging into his own thigh.

"Hello, Will," Hannibal says mildly, coming to a stop a few feet away from the treadmill. Some Omegas recognize familiar Alphas by their voice no matter their mental state. It is possible that all Will needs, as he always does, is some quiet conversation.

Will growls, upper lip curling back. There is no blood in his mouth – despite Jack's dramatic declaration, clearly Will didn't get close enough to actually harm the EMT. His lips are dark, like he's been chewing on them. His jaws part and he sucks in a deep breath through his mouth, scenting the air with ragged, panting breaths.

Hannibal sets his bag down and opens it, but doesn't remove any of the syringes. He doesn't want to antagonize Will until he must. "Jack tells me you attacked one of the first responders," he continues. Will growls, and Hannibal watches as one corner of his mouth twitches upwards. "You tried to rip his throat out."

Will makes another low sound. This time, he's definitely smiling, in the same way a wolf smiles right before it lunges. Hannibal smiles back.

He takes a step forward and crouches down, one knee to the floor. Will's eyes dart down, measuring the distance, hand around the pipe curling. He's calculating, waiting until Hannibal crawls just a little too close.

"Did you want to hurt him, Will?" Hannibal asks. He watches the flash of gold, molten in Will's eyes. Will possesses the gene in hazel eyes that lets them change color, but gold is universal for Omegas. It is triggered by the hormones released in their id-state, indicative of a loss of evolved brain function. In the same way that Alphas, when rutting, show their red.

Will curls his fingers into his thigh, bares his teeth, and growls again. "Shh -." He stutters, hissing the word. His nose wrinkles like he smells something bad and he jerks, shoulders colliding with the wall. Hannibal doesn't break his gaze and Will closes his eyes, takes in a shuddering breath. "Shh."

"Will -." Hannibal reaches forward and Will's eyes snap open. He lunges, clawing at Hannibal's coat sleeve, and Hannibal draws back, pushing himself to his feet. Will had moved fast and directly enough to hurt himself – there's blood around his wrist from the handcuff's bite.

"Shh!" Will snarls, then covers his ear with his free hand. He shakes his head again.

Hannibal sighs through his nose, then turns towards his bag. "Very well," he replies. His tone is scolding and Will whines like a beaten dog. He takes out a syringe and pulls the cap off. "If you want to behave like an animal, that is how I'll treat you."

Will growls at him but Hannibal is swift, clear of thought, and has the advantage of an Alpha's strength on his side. Will lunges for him again but his movement is hampered from his position and his lock against the pipe. He catches Hannibal's coat in his teeth and bites but then Hannibal has a hand in his hair, jerking his head hard enough that Will goes limp, gasping.

Hannibal kneels, forces Will's head forward, and drives the syringe into his shoulder through his shirt. The plunger reacts immediately and Hannibal pulls it out, sliding his hand to Will's nape to keep him docile while the medication does its work.

Omeegas are naturally placated by a touch to their necks. At first, Hannibal suspects it was simply a survival instinct – submitting to something bigger and stronger when it had its teeth at your throat was the only way to survive, and some animals still rely on that method of establishing dominance. Now, though, it is more than a simple case of dominance and submission. There are pressure points in an Omega's neck that trigger a feeling of calm and pliancy.

Will moans after a moment, his shoulders going lax and his head hanging. He's not trembling anymore and Hannibal slides his hand back up through Will's sweaty hair, forcing him to lift his head.

Will's eyes open, blinking blearily, the gold fading to the pretty mesh of blues and greens that Hannibal is much more familiar with. He's sweaty and smells like it, but the bitterness of his scent is fading away, much to Hannibal's relief.

Hannibal cups Will's jaw, forces him to turn and meet Hannibal's eyes. "Hello, Will," he says, when Will's eyes sharpen and focus on him.

Will's cheeks turn pink and he ducks his gaze. Naturally unable to hold eye contact with an Alpha. Promising. "Hello, Doctor Lecter," he says. He's quiet, stuttering. His entire demeanor is flowing away like water into a drain, filling back in with the naturally softer and sweeter nature of an Omega. Will's mouth quirks, his voice bland; "Did I miss our appointment?"

Hannibal manages a smile. "What do you remember?"

Jack opens the door and steps inside and Will goes tense, whining almost too softly to hear. His scent colors in shame, he turns his head and Hannibal lets him go and stands. He wipes Will's sweat on his scarf and tries to ignore the urge to press his hands under his nose.

"Will," Jack greets with a nod, voice stern. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I got hit with a sledgehammer," Will replies dryly. Hannibal smiles. "My wrist hurts."

"We had to handcuff you," Jack says. "Do you remember what happened?"

Will pressed his lips together. "Um," he says. He looks down at his bleeding wrist and huffs. "Your, ah, killer was in rut when he murdered the receptionist. He's probably mated, he's... scared. He won't live far from here."

Jack presses his lips together. "So, not the Ripper."

"Nah," Will replies, shaking his head. He swipes his thumb under his nose and sniffs, wincing. "My head is killing me."

"My advice would be fluids and rest," Hannibal says, looking over at Jack. "Now, if you don't mind, I believe my work here is done."

"Thank you, Doctor Lecter," Jack says. Will manages a weak, off-center smile. His exhaustion is endearing.

That night, Hannibal hauls the body of the rutting Alpha from the hotel into his basement. The man had been short, but beefy, like he had been trying to overcompensate for his height with muscle mass. There is wonderful marbling on his shoulders and arms, and his organs are rich with blood. His rut has given his meat a spicy aftertaste, capsaicin and cinnamon. Hannibal slices brisket from his chest and grinds up his organs into sausage.

Hannibal has only known Will for a few months. Throughout their time together, he has made a few, very careful set of observations about Will. The first is that Will, like Hannibal, is not completely honest with the demeanor he portrays to the outside world. It is easily, comically so, for an Omega to display themselves as sweet, a little naïve, a little too innocent for their own good.

Will's sharp tongue betrays him, sometimes. His power of observation is admirable, the level of empathy he possesses is extraordinary. If anyone could be Hannibal's undoing, he is certain that it would be Will. Up until this point, he has reacted to this conclusion by treading carefully. It is almost impossible to psychologically manipulate an Omega without leaving some kind of imprint on them, either in the form of a mating bite, sexual contact, or some other coercive physical touch.

Hannibal had never considered that route because it would mean, eventually, having to end Will's life as well. He cannot possibly afford to have a mate, after all, especially one under the thumb of an Alpha such as Jack. If Will is still loyal to his pack Alpha, it would threaten Hannibal's position as head of the household and head of Will's heart. The only solution to that would be to go as far as necessary to keep Will compliant, but it is simply unsustainable and Hannibal is in no mood to humor a mate too weak to be worthy of him.

But today has shown him something – it's a sudden realization, and one he stewes on for the entire time he drives the body back to his house, dissects and packages the leftover meat cuts and organs. It hits him like Will's scent had hit him earlier that day.

Perhaps Will is not so pure of heart after all. If Hannibal does this correctly, and places pressure in just the right ways, and coaxes the perfect amount, and guides Will by the neck until he's more loyal to Hannibal than his own family – well, wouldn't that just be a most delightful prize?

"How is Will?"

"He's resting, like you suggested," Jack says. He sighs and shakes his head, picking absently at piece of the rutting Alpha Hannibal killed last Thursday. "He was very distressed after I told him what had happened. He said he didn't remember anything after he'd read the killing."

"Psychological trauma is best left unscrutinized in most Omega brains," Hannibal says. "It is not uncommon for their species to simply...block out the traumatic event."

"Even so," Jack says. "It's unsettling."

Hannibal pauses, making sure he takes the perfect amount of time to chew and swallow his mouthful. "You are Will's legal guardian, are you not? With the FBI?"

Jack raises an eyebrow. "Just for the sake of professionalism," he says. Hannibal nods. Without any surviving Alpha relatives, and living out of state from his parents, Will is required by law to be signed into the guardianship of a pack Alpha until he mates. It is for his own protection as much as anything else. "Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity, mostly," Hannibal says mildly. "I think he would benefit from mating."

Jack snorts. "Yeah, well, it's difficult to talk to Will about stuff like that. Like I said, I try to keep things professional."

"I understand," Hannibal replies, taking another bite. The brisket really is delicious; the rutting hormones add a tang to the meat that he rather enjoys. He makes a note of it for future reference. "But having a pack Alpha is not the same as having a mate. I truly believe Will would improve in all aspects of his life with the stable presence of an Alpha."

"Well, unless you're willing to do it," Jack says with a roll of his eyes, gesturing to Hannibal with his fork. "I can't exactly secretly sign him up for dating sites."

Hannibal goes silent. Now that he has committed to his plan, the idea that Will would meet a different Alpha and let them put their weak, disgusting hands on him makes him bristle. "I'll be direct with you, then, Jack," he says, putting his fork down and taking a sip of wine. Jack regards him with a raised eyebrow. "I have a summer cabin on the bay. I would like to take Will there, so that he is away from the violence and horrors you regularly make him see. It would give him a chance to re-center himself. I wanted to try some other therapies with him. I believe the new environment will help this."

"Just you and him, huh? On some cabin somewhere in the woods?" Jack huffs, smiling.
"You're not subtle, Hannibal."

"If I wished to be subtle, I would be," Hannibal says, smiling around another sip of wine. "I intend to mate with Will. That is, once he is stable enough, and if he accepts me. It is simply impossible to follow proper courting procedure in his current mental state."

"And here I thought you were a confirmed bachelor," Jack says, taking another bite of food and washing it down with wine. "Was this dinner invitation just to butter me up?"

Hannibal smiles. "Not my intention. But, if it has that effect, I encourage you to embrace it."

Jack laughs and raises his glass. Hannibal follows suit, gently touching the sides of the glasses together. Hannibal can smell Jack's eagerness. A guardianship of someone like Will has the potential to be financially and emotionally draining, especially since Will does not live in the house with Jack and Bella.

Jack is nothing if not opportunistic. Hannibal has always liked that about him.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

I'm fudging up canon a LOT here, obviously.
More murder :D

"I know it's not really any of my business, but I think I owe it as your friend and colleague to say something."

Hannibal raises his eyes, his expression carefully neutral so as not to show his smile. He's sure his amusement shows in his eyes, though, because Alana's cheeks go pink and she ducks her gaze down. Instinctively deferential, but strong-willed. Hannibal likes that about her.

He had been wondering how long it would be before she brought it up. Apparently half of one of the special brews Hannibal makes just for her is enough.

"Say something about what?" he asks mildly, turning his attention back to slicing carrots for the roast. The rutting Alpha's tenderloin cut will make a fine 'beef' wellington, especially if he retains his spiced flavor.

Alana makes an aggravated, uncomfortable sound. She drums her nails on the edge of the countertop, once, like a countdown. "Will isn't stable enough," she says. "I warned Jack – I *told* him that he shouldn't drag Will along in his crazy crusade and now Will is – he's -."

"You care deeply about Will's wellbeing," Hannibal says.

Alana frowns. "Of course I do."

"And is it so hard to believe that I also care?" Hannibal lifts his eyes from the carrots in time to see Alana bite her lip and look down again. "You pride yourself in owning a monopoly on Will's friendships."

"That's not it," Alana says, insistently, but the kind of insistent she gets when she knows Hannibal is right. There are no Alpha or Omega women. Women simply are, or they are not. Alive or dead. They have instincts strong enough to know when some Alpha needs to be avoided, or an Omega needs to be protected, but they react to nothing as basic as heat or rut. It makes Alana's ability as a therapist both admirable and flawed; she can see right through Alpha posturing, does not react to the low-frequency manipulative whines Omegas can make. But, because she does not sense them, it means she cannot hope to understand them either. Not in all their intricacies.

She ducks her gaze again, resting her eyes on Hannibal's hands, and swallows. "Will is my friend," she says, slowly, measuring each word. "Jack told me you intend to take him away

for immersive behavioral therapy. I'm sorry, Hannibal, but there's only so many ways I can take that."

"Do you think Will should continue as he is?" Hannibal asks, knowing the way he's phrased it will force her to say 'No'. To one thing, they can absolutely both agree: Will cannot keep working for Jack in this capacity. It will scramble his beautiful brain and render him unfit for any kind of socialization. It would be kinder, after a certain point, to simply put him down.

Alana shakes her head and presses her lips together. She raises her eyes. She has pretty eyes, and a kind face. It's the face of a mother, when and if she ever decides to mate or raise young. Hannibal smiles at her.

"Alana, you have known me a very long time. Do you think I would do anything that would damage Will or endanger his wellbeing?" Hannibal asks, and she bites her lip and shakes her head again, slower this time. "And, at the risk of deflecting, you are being premature. I haven't even asked Will if he's amenable to the idea."

Alana blinks. "Oh," she says. Her blush darkens and she takes a sip of her beer. "Jack made it sound like it was already set in stone." She sounds relieved. Hannibal decides to ignore it for the sake of their friendship.

"Well, Jack is a man of absolutes," Hannibal replies, smiling. He slides the carrots off of the cutting board and into his palm, before laying them in a dish with zucchini, parsnips, rutabaga, and onions. "If you wouldn't mind finishing up here? We need to add some brussels sprouts, and then this can go in."

A rut is physically exhausting for an Alpha. It is triggered by being pair-bonded to a receptive Omega mate. Omegas produce the hormones necessary to trigger, treat, and sustain a rut in an Alpha so that they don't go into cardiac arrest or turn their brains to mush from the flood of hormones screaming at them to fuck and knot and, if necessary, kill.

Rutting with an Omega, especially one that is in an answering heat, cements a bond that is incredibly strong. It tells both parties that *this* person, *this* is the one that will give them what they need. The Alpha knows their Omega will not leave them because their knot, their seed, and their bites are the only thing that brings some semblance of relief for their heat. Similarly, an Omega knows that their Alpha seeks them for support, for something to sate their need to knot and breed. It is a system that is flawed, so basic it feels like something they should have honestly evolved from.

Lizard brains.

Hannibal knows these things like he knows the perfect shade of pink in a cut of meat, knows the sonnets of Dante and the feeling of bones in his teeth. He is above that, he cannot possibly allow himself to become *dependent* on Will. So, he will have to tread carefully.

Hannibal would not have been surprised if the Neutral shot had thrown Will into a sudden heat, since the medication is a synthesized version of the hormones an Omega might release during their heat. So, it comes as somewhat of a shock when he is called to the examination lab and sees Will sitting in the corner, on an empty table.

He looks, more or less, the same as he always does. His hair is fluffy – he took a shower this morning and let the warm front weather dry it over the course of the day. His posture is lax, but not *relaxed*, which is an important distinction to make. He's trying very hard, it seems, to project normalcy to the outside world.

Look at me, guys, I'm all better now!

Hannibal automatically gravitates to his side for two reasons. The first is that he has already had the unfortunate experience of being *in the way* at all times when in the lab. Will operates seamlessly with his companions, his Omega nature making him sensitive to every shift in the air and the heat of other bodies so that he's always out of the way at the perfect time. Hannibal, Alpha that he is, it used to others parting ways around him. And truthfully this is usually the case, but the Alphas that get employed in the FBI are *also* used to having people move out of their way. In the case of Jimmy and Brian, it's less abrasive than that – everyone they interact with is either Will, Beverly, or dead.

The second reason he moves closer is that it lets him get a good lungful of Will's scent, without the smell of cold bodies, latex, and old blood getting in the way. Will is tense, and shoots him a nervous glance behind his glasses. As Hannibal gets closer, his head gets lower, shoulders curling in. It's subtle but Hannibal, ever-attuned to how people react to him, notices.

He resists the urge to touch Will's hair, clenches one hand around the other under the fold of his coat to hide the gesture so that he doesn't placate Will with a hand on the back of his neck. *Carefully.*

"What do we have here?" he asks, since the examiners have gone silent and Will hardly starts a conversation with him without prompting. The body is one he recognizes, though he gives no indication of recognizing it, of course.

It's his most recent kill. The rutting Alpha that had so rudely soured Will's scent.

Will takes a deep breath, his eyes closing. "Found him strung up a few blocks from the hotel," Brain supplies after a moment, handing Hannibal a set of photographs. Hannibal sets his coat against Will's thigh and takes them.

Will doesn't move the coat. His fingers twitch like he wants to touch it, but he doesn't.

Hannibal observes the crime scene photos. Of course, it's nothing he hasn't seen before. The Alpha's lips are sewn shut, his eyelids cut off and his eyes mutilated to the point where no

one would be able to see that he was once an Alpha. Hannibal had gutted and sliced off all the meat he could use, and strung the body up for someone to easily find.

"This is the guy who attacked the receptionist and killed the doorman at the hotel," Brian says. "Time of death is several hours later, though. We already had the receptionist identify him as her attacker. So what the Hell happened between then and now?"

"It's a peace offering."

Beverly, Brian, and Jimmy go quiet, turning to look at Will. He still has his eyes closed, his head angled as though he's listening to someone speaking over his shoulder. It exposes the back of his neck in Hannibal's direction and Hannibal resists the urge to touch him.

"A peace offering?" Beverly repeats, eyebrows raised. "To who?"

Will opens his eyes, regards the body calmly. It's clear that whatever had triggered Will to exhibit the signs of rutting after witnessing the previous murder, it's not here now. Hannibal wonders why Jack would have called Will to such a crime in the first place – clearly Jack's obsession with catching the Ripper is clouding his judgement so much that everything looks like his doing.

Yes, Hannibal thinks they would all do well to have the Ripper lay low for a while.

Will's eyes flash. He's not in the mind of the rutting Alpha anymore – Hannibal reads his name on the bottom of a photograph. *Jason Brookshire*. How generic. Will's head isn't in Jason's, not anymore. He's not seeing the world through rage-tinted eyes. When Will looks at the body, Hannibal knows he sees the Ripper.

Will swallows. "To the receptionist, maybe?" he says, shrugging as though helpless. There's a catch in his tone and Hannibal hands the photographs back to Jimmy, who takes them. Beverly is much worse at hiding her skepticism. "Maybe she had a mate and he didn't like some Rutter attacking her. Or the doorman. I don't -." He stops with a hiss, reaching into his pocket, and pulls out of a bottle of aspirin.

"Come on," Beverly says, with a meaningful look at Jimmy and Brian. "We should go tell Jack this isn't a Ripper murder."

They nod and leave the room. Hannibal rests back against the edge of the table Will is sitting on. It's tall enough for grown men to perform autopsies on, and in contrast Will's feet barely brush the floor and it makes him look like a child.

He downs two aspirin like tic-tacs and swallows them dry, sliding the bottle back into his pocket. Hannibal is content to wait. He enjoys Will's silences – he likes the fact that when Will tries, he can be perfectly still. He rarely is. Will needs to move, small twitches and huffs that let other people know that he's still alive. He does it to remind himself that he can.

"Not a Ripper murder," Will finally says. Hannibal turns his head just enough to watch Will out of his periphery. Will smells wonderful today, minty and crisp. He showers with shampoo

that is designed to deaden his scent just enough that he's not overwhelmingly, distractingly Omega, but Hannibal can still breathe him in. "Did I say that? I don't think I said that."

"You believe this man," Hannibal says, nodding to the corpse, "is another victim of the Ripper?"

Will presses his lips together, rubs his hands over his jaw and down his neck. It's a touch as innocent as it is alluring. Will touches and exposes his neck so much that Hannibal wonders sometimes if it is in fact coincidence. Will pushes himself off of the table, his hand accidentally catching and dragging Hannibal's coat. He stops and puts it back with a muffled word of apology, and then approaches the dead man.

Hannibal follows, not only to watch as Will dissects his latest conquest, but to be near him. Will is warm in the chilled room, skin pale and eyes brightly blue in the fluorescence. Hannibal hopes to, one day, commit his image to paper, if only to be able to touch all the parts of Will he wants until he has Will's neck in his teeth.

"He took everything," Will says. Hannibal circles the table and stands at the other side of the dead man, so he can watch Will's face. Will raises his eyes, meets Hannibal's for a second longer than normal. Then, he bites his lip and looks back down and runs his hand over the air an inch from the dead Alpha's skin. He doesn't touch. "He took so much that it didn't look like he took anything, but he did. All the cuts were...they weren't tears. This wasn't an Alpha fight over mates or territory or anything like that. This was *precise*."

"And the eyes? The mouth?" Hannibal prompts. Will's eyes flash to his again. There's a wildness there, the same animal that had smirked at him in the hotel gym. There's a thin ring of gold between Will's iris and pupil, marking him as Omega. Gold and red are such complimentary colors.

"I..." Will hesitates, looking down at the Alpha's mangled eyes. He pulls back and grabs a pair of gloves from the little table cart by the Alpha's head, sliding them over his hands. Then he grabs a pair of small scissors and cuts the strings apart.

He sets the scissors down and forces the Alpha's jaws open. Wider, until he can peer into his mouth.

Will pauses, sucking in a breath. His fingers are trembling. "The Ripper took his teeth," he says, pulling the Alpha's lips back to expose the gaping holes where his canines once were. Although it is not obvious, Alphas usually have pronounced points on their canines to assist them in the act of placing a mating bite, subduing another Alpha, or, back in the old days, ripping the meat off the bones of their kill. There are four teeth missing from the Alpha's mouth, the upper and lower.

"The Ancient Greeks used to remove the teeth of Alphas who had raped Omegas and women," Hannibal says when Will takes his hands away, pulling the gloves off and setting them down on the table. Will looks at him. "They would also usually castrate the rapist so that he wouldn't be able to knot or bite anyone in the future."

"So our Ripper...what, some kind of sexual assault vigilante?" Will asks, scoffing. "No. This is different. This is..." His eyes go back to the body, raking over it, up and down.

"You said this was a peace offering," Hannibal murmurs. "Who do you think the Ripper is apologizing to?"

Will shakes his head. "Not a peace offering," he says. "I was wrong. That's not the word for it. It's an offer. It's a.... It's an offer." His eyes dart down to the Alpha's feet. "Like a gift. '*Look what I can do*'. The Ripper literally took everything away from this man, reduced him to *nothing*. 'I'm *better*, I can do what no one else can'."

Hannibal swallows so that he doesn't start purring. An Alpha's purr is primarily used to soothe their mates and children in times of distress, but it can also be brought on by great pleasure. Watching Will interpret his gift is almost arousing in how beautiful it is.

Will looks up at him. If he did catch any trace of reaction from Hannibal, he keeps it hidden. "The Ripper is looking for a mate," he says.

Hannibal blinks, feigning surprise. "I can't imagine many Omegas *or* women might be receptive to such an offer."

"Yeah." Will looks down, his fingers idly touching the table half an inch from the edge of the Alpha's mangled elbow, exposed at the bone from where Hannibal ripped the muscle off by the tendon. His fingers curl and he sucks in a breath, as though to say something else, but he swallows it, puts it behind his teeth, keeps it down. Hannibal looks forward to the day when Will speaks freely around him.

Omegas rely almost entirely on their sense of smell when it comes to navigating the world safely. Their nose will tell them if there is a strange Alpha lurking in the bushes on their path. It will tell them if an Alpha is angry or not, if someone is uncomfortable.

That is not to say that their other senses are much weaker.

Omegas have instincts ingrained into every nerve ending of their bodies. Hannibal has read case studies where an Omega has been able to feel the eyes of an Alpha on him in a crowded room despite a cacophony of distractions, smells, and noises to stop him sensing it. The number of stories where an Omega has predicted a fight or chaos and fled the scene and lived to tell the tale are countless. Omegas, Hannibal truly believes this, are the only reason their species survives at all. Without Omegas, Alphas would simply tear each other apart.

If Hannibal is to successfully ingratiate himself into Will's life, he must make Will feel comfortable and safe around him. This must happen before he even brings up his plan of whisking Will away to his cabin on the cliffs. Will would never go unless he felt safe with Hannibal.

So, Hannibal must do what he can to make sure he is no more foreign to Will than one of his dogs.

The first step, and the easiest one, is to make himself part of the pack. By assisting Jack with psychological profiles, he has already put himself in Will's mind as someone that can be trusted. If Jack – the pack Alpha – trusts Hannibal to be alone with Will and to conduct therapy sessions with him unescorted, then Will has no reason aside from his own instincts not to trust Hannibal as well.

But those instincts are sharp. Which is good. Hannibal would not bother otherwise.

He feeds Will's dogs pieces of sausage from the rutting Alpha. They like him immediately. Perhaps they can tell Hannibal's intentions, and approve. It hardly matters to him how much or how little they understand the motivations of someone like him, but it is important that the dogs see him as a friend. This is Will's family, his pride, for all intents and purposes. Without a mate and children, the dogs are his first line of defense, his alarm, and his companionship. So, Hannibal has to treat them kindly.

"Thanks for feeding the dogs. I know they can be a handful."

"It's my pleasure, Will," Hannibal replies. Will is not one prone to stillness, but now he is positively *jittery*. Hannibal knows what happened – Jack told him as much. They had hunted down the Minnesota Shrike. Will found him. He put ten bullets in the man. The daughter and wife hadn't made it.

Will wears the guilt on his shoulders like lead. His fingers tap against the arm of his chair, over and over, *taptaptap*, flatten out as though apologizing to the leather, start up again. He does it in sets of ten. Hannibal wonders if he even notices.

Of course, Will always notices.

"Do you feel guilt that you killed Garrett Jacob Hobbs, or that you couldn't save his daughter?"

Will's eyes flash up, gold flickering in them like a flash flood, before it's tamped out. His eyes are greener today. Sadness makes them dark. "I don't -." He hisses in a breath, high pitched, and rolls his head to one side. He stares at his fingers through his glasses like the world is in his palm. "I don't feel...*guilty* about them. It's not my fault Hobbs killed his daughter. Or that he killed those other girls."

"That is true," Hannibal says with a conceding nod. "But you're guilty about something."

Will looks like he's trying desperately not to make his face show any emotion. But just as sometimes pictures come into focus in negative light, the more Will tries to hide it, the worse it shows through. "There was a Ripper murder here while I was gone," he says.

Hannibal smiles. "I imagine Jack is not pleased."

"This is his second," Will says. "He kills in threes."

"Has Jack shown you this one yet?" Hannibal asks.

Will shakes his head. "He didn't want me there," he replies. His upper lip curls back, a snarl stuck in the base of his throat. But he won't let it out – Hannibal's job here is to evaluate him to go back in the field. He won't dare step out of place while Hannibal's signature hangs in the balance. Of course, Hannibal would never keep his future mate from such elegant, invaluable work.

"Do you resent Jack's control over you, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will's eyes flash, he swallows harshly and turns his head away. It exposes his throat and Hannibal knows it's a natural instinct to, essentially, placate an Alpha before he has the chance to be angry. Whatever Will wants to say, he knows Hannibal isn't going to like it. Or that he shouldn't like it.

Will keeps a permanent shield of stubble on his face, jaw, and neck. It makes him look older, stronger, and does the dual job of hiding any existing mating bites while eliminating the ease with which one would lay another. Alphas are compelled to mark their mates visibly, openly on the neck. One of Hannibal's favorite daydreams is having Will, sweet and bare for him, completely trusting in his hands as Hannibal places a straight razor against his throat and slices the hair away.

Hannibal thinks about how sweet Will would taste, seasoned with sweat and the first trickles of heat hormones, when Hannibal bites his neck and suckles the hot gush of his blood. Whether it's food or slick or their necks, Omegas know that a way to an Alpha's heart is through his mouth.

"I know why he has to do it," Will says, a platitude to soothe when there's no need. Hannibal likes pieces of Jack, he does not like the man as a whole. "I get it."

He turns his head back, meets Hannibal's eyes. The loss of the sight of Will's gorgeous neck makes Hannibal want to growl. "I didn't ask if you understood," he says. "I asked if you resent it."

"It's this until I mate," Will says with a shrug too cavalier and rehearsed. "And I don't see that happening any time soon."

His hands smooth back out on the armrests of the chair. *Taptaptap*.

Hannibal clears him for the field, and Jack calls them almost immediately to examine the newest Ripper case.

"You know this is easier when I'm at the crime scene," Will says, the acid on his tongue sharp enough to sting Hannibal's nose. He hides a smile by turning to examine the second board of photographs from the crime scene.

Again, nothing he hasn't seen before.

"Yeah, well, next time don't empty a magazine into a guy's chest and I won't pull your leash so hard."

Oh, if looks could kill.

Omeegas are not weak, simpering creatures, despite what Hollywood and Alpha-centric historians would have people believe. Of course, there are those that play into the stereotype, just like there are women who want nothing more than to bake cookies and keep a home, and Alphas who would start fights just to feel the bloodlust-high of a kill.

Will is not weak.

The same feeling Hannibal had upon seeing Will handcuffed to the water pipe rises in him. Will is not to be *leashed*, or *chained*. He blinks and looks away before the emotion can show on his face.

Will clears his throat and looks towards the first board. Hannibal steps closer and Will moves away, to regard the second. It's a tame, childish game of chase. Hannibal smiles.

Will raises a hand and taps his fingertips against the flowers in the chest cavity of the woman Hannibal slaughtered. *Taptaptap*. "What kind of flowers are there?" he asks.

"Beverly identified the big ones as Protea," Jack says. "They're South African. The white ones are Queen Anne's Lace, or something like that."

"These aren't things you just pick up in the park," Will says, turning to regard Jack. "What do they mean?"

Hannibal presses his lips together when both Jack and Will look at him. He supposes it's a good thing he has a reputation for obscure artistic licenses. "Protea is usually implicit of transformation and diversity," he says. "So named after the son of Poseidon, Proteus, who had the great gift of prophecy but chose to sleep rather than use it. He would change his shape to avoid people who wanted to come get insight from him."

Will huffs a laugh.

"Queen Anne's Lace represents sanctuary," Hannibal finishes, turning back to look at the images on the boards. "Perhaps the Ripper is making more promises."

"*More* promises? What does that mean?" Jack says, immediately on the alert and fixing Will with an expectant look.

Will winces, looking away. "I...Hannibal and I think that the Ripper is trying to court someone."

He looks back up to the board. The victim this time had been a woman. She's on her knees, her face turned up so that she's illuminated by the park light above her head. Her hair is braided and draped over one shoulder, long enough to cover her breast. Her hands have been positioned to cup the other breast, and it has been hollowed out to allow the flowers to sit inside of it like some macabre bouquet. Her stomach has been sliced open at the bottom, where a c-section would take place, her uterus removed and dangling from her cupped hands.

"He took everything that made her a woman," Will whispers, and if Hannibal didn't know any better, he'd say his expression is one of admiration. "Just like he took everything that made Jason Brookshire an Alpha." He straightens up. "It's an Omega that's caught his eye."

"Well, that hardly narrows it down," Jack utters darkly.

"It means your Ripper is definitely an Alpha," Hannibal offers brightly.

Will scoffs. "Yeah, like an Omega would ever do something like this."

Hannibal smiles. "You never know, Will," he says. "There's a first time for everything."

Chapter 3

"I've been giving a lot of thought to family."

"Oh?" Hannibal looks up from his notebook. Will hasn't moved – he's still staring at his fingertips, tucked together and tapping against the arm of his chair. Hannibal wonders if he's upped his suppressant dose. His scent is duller than usual and one of the side effects is restlessness and constant fidgeting.

"Well..." Will pulls his lips back so Hannibal can see his teeth are gritted, the tips of his incisors scraping together before settling into his natural overbite. He sucks in a breath. "I guess not so much family in general. Specific family. Mine. Or lack thereof."

"The mating and nesting instinct is a natural one," Hannibal says lightly. "Do you think about family in a positive way?"

Will huffs a small, self-deprecating laugh. His head rolls to one side just enough that Hannibal can see a flash of his pretty golden-green eyes before Will averts his gaze again. "Tell me, Doctor, are you familiar with Doctor Greystone's Reactionary Theory?" Hannibal cocks his head to one side in answer. "She asserts that Alphas and Omegas evolved purely out of reaction to the existence of the other. That...that there exists, for every personality type and every genetic markup of an Omega, a perfectly balanced Alpha counterpart."

Hannibal resists the urge to scoff at the idea of a female understanding anything of the intricacies of Alpha and Omega relationships. He knows that's not the part Will is focusing on. "Does it distress you, to think you might have a perfect mate out there?" he asks instead.

Will laughs. It's a bitter sound. "I wouldn't want there to be two of me," he says, lifting his eyes again in a brief, daring show of challenge.

"What I believe you're referring to is a pair bond," Hannibal says, shifting his weight in his chair. Will's eyes lower and he bites his lip, tapping out another set of ten on the arm of his own chair. *Taptaptap*. "It's one of the building blocks of Alpha-Omega matings, Will."

"I suppose you could argue that I've only pair bonded with serial killers and psychopaths," Will says, his tone icy. There's a spark of anger in his eyes, gone just as quickly as it had come. Resentment, just as Hannibal suspected. "It's hard to attach oneself emotionally to someone when all you can think about is what would make them a killer. Or how you'd do it yourself."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, suppressing his purr with what feels like all his strength. "Do you think about killing people, Will?" he asks.

Will swallows, grits his teeth, bares them. "Yes," he replies, hissing the word.

"And how does that make you feel?"

Taptaptap.

"...Like it would take a very special Alpha to service my needs."

Hannibal smiles. "You're deflecting," he says.

"Sometimes I think you look at me and see something everyone else doesn't," Will replies. He hasn't moved his eyes from where Hannibal's hands are curled around his notebook. Hannibal's notes are kept very sparse when in session – he writes everything out after the fact, in the privacy and solitude of his own thoughts.

"What is it that you think I see?"

Will smiles. It's lopsided, more of a twitch at the corner of his mouth than a real smile. Like he knows what Hannibal wants to hear and is deciding whether or not to give it to him. As a fisherman, Will has to choose his bait carefully, fashion the lure with each fish in mind.

Finally he moves his eyes away, to the couch sitting at the third point of the triangle of furniture in Hannibal's study. His hair is getting long, long enough to curl around his neck and hide his nape and the tendon that protects one of an Omega's most vulnerable pressure points. His beard does a good job of hiding the rest of his neck from Hannibal's gluttonous gaze.

Then, he swallows. *Taptaptap*. "Potential." He whispers the word, throws it out as silently as casting a line. He waits for Hannibal to bite.

Hannibal has to swallow back a mouthful of saliva and he looks down at his notebook. He taps his pen against the pages and realizes too late that it's as good a tell as any, to someone like Will. He doesn't reply.

The next stage, after ingratiating himself to Will's dogs, is to make Will associate his scent with comfort and security. This process has already been started, put in place before Hannibal's plan to seduce and mate Will had fully taken root. Will frequents Hannibal's study often enough that, despite the distressing conversations they might engage in, there is a subconscious correlation between safety and Hannibal's scent in Will's brain already.

Hannibal must endeavor to make sure he remains controlled and calm as much as possible in Will's presence. Omegas are soothed in the presence of an Alpha that can maintain their veneer of humanity even in the most extreme circumstances – and Hannibal is *very* good at keeping his outward appearance unruffled on all occasions.

So, one night after hunting, Hannibal goes to Will's land and starts to spread his scent. Not so strongly that Will might be under the impression he's being stalked or crowded, but enough that he will definitely smell *Alpha*, and hopefully an Alpha's scent that he associates with security and comfort. He creates a spiderweb of trails and scent-marks, enough that his scent

will be *subtly* in the wind for Will to sense whenever he's out with his dogs or fishing in the river.

Watching Will retrace the steps of a masterpiece is truly an invigorating sight. It takes all of Hannibal's self-control not to purr and smile as he watches with Jack from the back of the room as Will stands in front of his latest conquest.

Will's eyes are closed, eyes moving back and forth beneath his lids as he clears the room with his mind. His lips are parted like he's scenting the air, taking in the scents of slick, blood, and tears through the roof of his mouth. He opens his eyes and they're dark, gleaming in the low lights of the room. They are in the changing area for the public pool and the smell of chlorine is almost overpowering.

"This one's the Ripper," Jack stage-whispers to Hannibal. Will's jaw clenches, his head twitching to one side. Because of the way the room is built, everything echoes, and he knows Will can hear it. "I know it."

"I walk up behind Mister Wallace and snap his neck," Will says, his voice low. It's like every word is coming out of him forced. He opens his eyes and moves, circling one of the benches in the middle of the locker rows and mimics grabbing the Omega by the neck and snapping his head sharply to one side. "It paralyzes him, but does not kill him instantly." His eyes follow the same path as the Omega's did, slumping to the floor. "I take no delight in making him suffer. He's a means to an end. I still need his blood pumping."

Will steps back, eyes following the invisible path of when Hannibal hoisted the Omega – he'd been a slim, dainty thing, easily moved – onto the bench where the body now rests. Will reaches out, his fingers curling over the open chest cavity, but not touching. "I cut him... here," he says, pointing two fingers and sliding them down the center of the Omega's belly. "And I open him up. I remove everything except his...uterus and -."

Will hesitates, closing his eyes again. He winces hard enough that it's almost a flinch, his back gently touching one of the rows of lockers. Hannibal resists the urge to go over and make sure that he's okay. There's a sheen of sweat on Will's brow.

"Jack, tell me," Hannibal whispers, much more quietly than Jack had. "Has Will upped his suppression prescription?" As Will's legal guardian, Jack would be required to sign off on such a thing.

Jack presses his lips together and nods. "Since the incident at the hotel," he replies. As Hannibal suspected: Will is so afraid of losing himself to his instincts again that he has begun to chemically subdue and fight them.

"I would suggest my solution soon, then," Hannibal says with a meaningful look Will's way. "It's going to damage him, to play both sides of our species' thoughts while suppressing the natural reactions to them."

Jack nods. "You have my verbal consent," he says. "And, if necessary, I'll sanction an official order."

Hannibal understands what he's saying. If Will resists, it will be no problem on Jack's part to take his choice away entirely. It would not be a promising start to begin their relationship on such bitter, tenuous grounds, but Hannibal has surmounted greater odds. He's confident, once he has Will away, that the Omega will find himself much happier and much more stable.

He turns his attention back to Will when Will straightens. Sweat is darkening his collar, now, his hair is damp and curling with it. "I cut Mister Wallace's neck, mimicking a mating scar," he says. "I have claimed him, removed everything *except* what makes him an Omega." He stutters, stopping. "This is what he wants," he whispers.

"Will?" Jack hazards. Will closes his eyes, shakes his head, and holds up a hand. It's shaking.

"He's mine, everything that he is belongs to me," Will whispers, opening his eyes again. "This is my design."

After a moment, he straightens up and sighs. The distress melts from him like snow in spring, there's a calm in his eyes that Hannibal finds oddly unsettling. "It's the Ripper, Jack," he says, walking away from the corpse so the coroners can collect the body and the photographers and Beverly can finish their work.

"An Alpha, a woman, an Omega," Jack mutters, shaking his head with a look of bewilderment on his face. "I thought you said he was trying to court someone. Why would he kill an Omega to get one's attention?"

"It wasn't about the death," Will says. "He didn't let Mister Wallace suffer. For all intents and purposes, he died without pain." He looks back at the corpse, at the impressive pool of blood surrounding the bench and trailing down to a drain in the middle aisle. "This was...more comforting. He didn't want to destroy the parts of Mister Wallace that were most precious to him."

Jack raises his eyebrows, looking at Hannibal. "Do you agree with his assessment, Doctor Lecter?" he asks, not even trying to keep the incredulousness out of his voice.

Beside him, Hannibal feels Will bristling, eyes on the side of his neck. Mocking, almost. Will is angered by what he's seen – or, perhaps, how he's reacting to what he has seen. "I think Will is the best qualified out of all of us to interpret how Alphas act around Omegas," he says instead of anything else, letting a hint of a smile come to his face. "Perhaps, in this string of murders, the Ripper is showing us the traits he most desires in a mate."

"He's already found his mate," Will says. Jack's eyes snap to him and Hannibal turns, much less rushed. Will's eyes are dull, heady-lidded. He looks exhausted. "Look at it."

Jack scoffs. "I don't need serial killer mating season in my town," he grumbles, straightening his coat. "Go home, both of you. You've done your part."

Will doesn't argue. He walks with Hannibal out of the public pool. The air is crisp and cold, and Will's breath mists in the air as he shivers and pulls his sweater closer around himself. Since he'd been sweating, Hannibal imagines he's feeling the bite of frost a lot more than he is.

"Did Jack drive you?" he asks.

Will nods. He doesn't ask for a ride back, but simply follows Hannibal to his car and slides into the passenger seat without a word. Hannibal is pleased, adoring of his Omega's brashness. Will is perhaps the only person whose rudeness Hannibal finds endearing, rather than abrasive.

It does have the rather lovely perk of mixing their scents in his car, as well. Hannibal turns it on and lets the heaters do their work while Will's shivers lessen until he seems comfortable, cheeks flushed in the heat of the car. Then and only then does Hannibal begin to drive.

They sit in silence. Will has his forehead pressed against the window, his hands idly rubbing across his thighs and the seat of the chair where it's exposed between his legs. It's incredibly distracting, since it means Will's throat is mostly bare and with the way his hair is clinging to his skin, it would be so easy to brush the curls away and touch the nape of his neck. Hannibal wonders how easily Will's body would throw itself into a heat once he was off suppressants. If Hannibal would simply have to say his name and Will would kneel for him.

Will bites his lip, turns his head so he can catch Hannibal's eye and Hannibal puts his gaze back on the road. "Do I worry you so much, Doctor Lecter?" he asks, too teasing to be serious, too tired to be playful.

Hannibal allows himself a small pause. "I consider us friends, Will," he replies, slowing the car to a stop at a red light. It changes to green quickly after and he keeps driving. "I would be remiss if I did not care about your wellbeing."

"You sound like Alana," Will mutters, rolling his eyes. He sits up straight and Hannibal immediately mourns the loss of his exposed neck.

"Perhaps you will listen to one of us, then, if we are telling you the same thing."

"Not when your motivations are different," Will replies. Hannibal lets out a hum of encouragement. "Alana has 'professional curiosity'."

"And you believe that this is not true?" Hannibal replies. Will is silent for a moment, and when Hannibal looks at him again, he sees that Will is smiling, like Hannibal just lost a game he hadn't known they were playing. He tries to think over Will's words for where he might have slipped up.

Will looks down at his lap, slides his hands over his thighs again and squeezes just shy of his knees. "I'm right about the Ripper," he says, leaping like a tree frog from conversation to conversation. He flits between so many trains of thought at once, some of them not even his own. "He knows exactly who he wants for his mate. It's an Omega. It's...it's Reaction

Theory," he says, looking up like the thought just occurred to him. "Maybe the Ripper is a study of Doctor Greystone as well."

"You think he must believe that the Omega he seeks is his perfect equal and opposite?" Hannibal asks.

"Someone like him wouldn't just pick *anyone*. This Omega must be special to have caught his eye."

Hannibal doesn't say anything, and neither does Will. When he lets out his dogs they seem just as happy to see Hannibal as they are to see Will, and when Hannibal gets in his car and drives away, he can see Will watching him go in the rear-view mirror.

"Since Will hasn't come storming into my office to bite my head off, I can assume you haven't proposed your intentions to him yet."

Hannibal offers Jack a smile as he refills his wine. "The last time Will and I spoke was at the murder site of Mister Wallace," he says, and sets the decanter down before taking his seat. "I thought it might be a little...obtuse, to broach the subject under the circumstances."

"Well, this will be it from the Ripper for a while," Jack mutters. "He kills in threes. He's done for now."

"Yes."

Tonight they're eating the Omega's liver, sautéed with onions, serrano chili, garlic and, of course, lemongrass. Hannibal finds that he's eating more and more food that tastes like Will smells. He ought to be careful, but he's feeling indulgent today.

He's pleased Will received his message the way it was intended. Hannibal could not bring himself to harm the Omega in any way he might harm Will – his uterus, his brain, his eyes, and his heart had all been left intact. These are all things that Hannibal must master within Will if he is to shape him into the perfect mate.

"Perhaps I will bring it up to him instead," Jack says. "He may be less likely to argue."

Hannibal smiles to hide the fact that he wants to bare his teeth. "I appreciate the offer, Jack, but if I am to mate with Will I cannot show such weakness as having you ask for me."

Jack huffs a laugh, waving his fork. "Of course. I forget how Omegas are. It's all about strength, isn't it?"

"Are you suggesting that women are not the same way?"

"Of course not. No, I know we're all capable of great emotional depth and bonding, but women are much more rational than, I think, their male counterparts are." He takes a bite of

the Omega's liver and hums. "No heat, no ruts, and much less likely to have a separation end messily. Altogether neater, in my opinion."

"Have you only ever dated women, Jack?" Hannibal asks.

Jack nods. "Didn't have much of an option, in the military. Omegas weren't allowed within ten miles of a potential stressor back then." Hannibal nods, because that is in fact the case. Even with the new liberations within the last ten years, the fact that Will works so intimately with murder and darkness is a risk for Jack, both personally and professionally. As his legal guardian and his boss, Jack stands to lose on two fronts if Will is incapable of handling his position.

"Do you think of yourself as some kind of progressive, then?" Hannibal asks. "Allowing Will to work so closely with the FBI like this?"

Jack regards him for a long, cool moment. "Ability is ability," he replies after another moment. "Regardless of sex or gender. It's not progression, it's simply -."

"Opportunity?" Hannibal finishes, smiling.

"Well, yes, I suppose so." Jack meets his smile and takes a sip of wine.

Hannibal straightens in his seat, setting his fork down and folding his hands together, fingers laced. "I have another appointment with Will tomorrow night," he says. "If he appears to be of reasonably calm and sound mind, I will propose behavior therapy to him."

"During a therapy session?" Jack asks, eyebrow raised.

Hannibal smiles. "Will and I do not conduct therapy sessions, Jack. We merely have friendly conversations." He shrugs, a gesture of nonchalance that seems to put Jack at ease.

Jack huffs a laugh. "Still, I feel obligated to say I'll be expecting updates and reports daily on Will's treatment," he says. "I trust you, Doctor Lecter, and I trust your expertise. But Will is a machine without a manual and there's no telling how he will react if you go poking and prodding around inside that brain of his."

"Consider me warned."

Jack hums. "This is delicious, Hannibal. Beef?"

"Pork," Hannibal replies, and Jack nods and takes another bite.

"You have to point me in the direction of your butcher," he says. "I'm never disappointed at the quality of meat."

Hannibal smiles. "Happily."

"Have you been giving any more thought to family, Will?"

Will isn't sitting today. He's antsy and pacing, though he is trying to keep his strides slow and relaxed. But Hannibal can see the tension in his shoulders, the twitch of his fingers in his pockets like he's trying to stifle the urge to reach out and break something.

Will barks out a bitter laugh. "No," he says. "How can I?"

Hannibal blinks at him, cocking his head to one side. After a moment, he closes his notebook and stands, setting it on his desk. Will's eyes follow him. They're a paler blue now, so much so that the gold stands out, almost glowing.

Hannibal walks away from the notebook and stands at the side of his desk closest to Will. Not crowding or corralling him, but making sure Will has him in plain sight and that they are standing as equals. The fact that he is taller than Will and broader in the chest, and an Alpha to boot, is made more obvious when he's standing. It will help to settle Will if he allows Hannibal's calm to influence him.

Will ducks his head, like clockwork, curls his shoulders in and turns, leaning up against the ladder to the upper level of the study. "It's my fault," he says after a moment, his eyes flashing towards Hannibal. "The Alpha, the woman, the Omega."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "Why are those deaths your fault?"

"The Ripper knows me," he says. "He knows I can see him. And I think..." He looks away, shakes his head. "It's correlation. Coincidence."

"You sound like you're trying to convince yourself more than me," Hannibal says. He steps forward and sits on the corner of his desk. It puts him closer to Will with the air of looking unintentional, and the slight diminishment of his presence won't scare Will away.

"Do you think he's lonely?" Will asks, tilting his head forward and staring at his feet. "He wants to be seen. All artists do."

"It is a weakness of our pride that demands an audience," Hannibal replies with a nod. Will huffs, pressing his lips together. He slides his hands out of his pockets and they hang, twitching like dying birds. "Will, how much suppressant medication are you on?"

Will frowns, lifting his eyes to meet Hannibal's. Then he bites his lip and looks away. "That's none of your business," he says.

"Jack is worried about you."

"Jack can go suck his own knot," Will bites out, before he straightens up and clears his throat. "Don't tell him I said that."

Hannibal smiles. "Everything you say to me here is in confidence, Will," he says. "I would never betray what you said to me privately, especially when I agree with it."

Will smiles. It shows his teeth, and he pushes himself away from the ladder and walks to Hannibal's desk. His hand reaches out, brushes the dark wood by Hannibal's thigh. Hannibal watches, enraptured by the movement of bones and tendons under Will's skin, the way his fingers curl around the edges of Hannibal's notebook, straightens the askew angle of his pen.

Then he looks up. Will is standing incredibly close, enough that even with suppressants Hannibal can take in deep drags of his scent, that gorgeous mint and lemongrass sharpness. Hannibal can see the dip of Will's throat, the pretty arch of his neck up close. Will has never let him this close before.

Then Will turns his head, catches his eye, and smiles.

Hannibal smiles back, unable to stop himself, and then Will moves away. It takes a moment for Hannibal to remember how to do anything except sit and stare at his retreating back.

Will takes a seat in his chair and Hannibal slowly walks to the other, sitting down without his notebook. Will clears his throat and smooths his hands out across the padded armrests. There's no tapping. "I see myself tearing into that Alpha's flesh," he says, finally. "I see myself ripping that woman's uterus from her. I see...I see myself breaking the Omega's neck." He swallows and meets Hannibal's eyes.

"Does it distress you?" Hannibal asks when Will is silent.

Will shakes his head. "No," he replies. "I find it...oddly comforting."

"How so?"

"The Ripper, whoever he is, he wants to impress his mate, not intimidate him." Will rubs his hands over his mouth, down his jaw, and sighs. "He doesn't want a weak *bitch* to just spread his legs and take his knot. Whoever this Omega is that the Ripper wants, he sees him as an equal. I find comfort in that."

"You believe Alphas are predetermined to think of their mates as lesser," Hannibal says. "A notion that history and Hollywood has done little to correct."

"Please, spare me the 'Not All Alphas' speech," Will mutters.

Hannibal smiles. "On the contrary, Will, I find most of my breed to be boorish, reckless, and altogether too focused on their lower half's train of thought than that of the one in their head." Will huffs, but he's smiling and he looks more relaxed. "I'm saying that you are right, and I don't fault you for finding comfort in the idea of an Alpha who wanted a mate as an equal."

Will presses his lips together and looks down again, sighing. "I've been on suppressants since I moved here," he says, jumping from one lily pad of conversation to another. Hannibal blinks and nods. "Since the...since the hotel, I wanted – I can't let that happen again."

"Suppressing your Omega nature will not stop you succumbing to the mindsets of Alphas," Hannibal says gently. "It may worsen it, in fact. Your mind will be so busy trying to be *not* something that you run the risk of falling the opposite way entirely."

"So you think I should go off my meds?" Will asks, almost disgusted. It's a strange, sour look on him. Hannibal has known Will to be distressed by, even ashamed of his body and actions, but never disgusted by it.

Hannibal sighs through his nose. He supposes this is as good a time as any to put the final, largest stage of his plan into place. "Tell me, Will, what do you know of behavioral therapy?"

Chapter 4

"Behavioral therapy?"

Will reacts to it much as Hannibal anticipated he would. Shock, disgust...a flint-strike of curiosity. It is a common law in Omega nature, however unfortunate and despite however many liberation movements there might be, that Omegas are attracted to wealth, status, and strength. Hannibal, of course, has all three in spades. It is not enough to override any lack of aesthetic attraction or chemical compatibility, but it's enough to pique Will's interest where his lizard brain sits.

Will shifts his weight in his chair, spreads his hands out along the wide armrests, and keeps his gaze ducked and focused on where the tip of Hannibal's shoe is, one leg crossed over the other and foot suspended in the air. Hannibal blinks and remains still, allowing Will to think.

Will swallows, his throat clicks. "Did Jack put you up to this?" he whispers, quiet and cutting as a knife between the ribs.

Hannibal smiles and shakes his head and Will raises his eyes, fighting the urge to deflect from eye contact with Hannibal when he had made it so clear at their first meeting that he doesn't like it. He wants to know if Hannibal is lying, and Hannibal is not lying, so he accepts Will's challenge openly.

Will swallows again, lips parting. He drags his nails across the armrests and then forces his palms flat again. "With who? You?"

"Ideally, yes," Hannibal replies lightly. Will finally loses the battle with himself and his eyes drop. "You seem to already have a notion of what that would entail."

Will nods. Behavioral therapy, also known as 'Instinct-Driven Therapy', is largely used for Omegas who have been exposed to some kind of trauma that renders them unable to relax enough to trust their instincts. Contrary to popular belief, it is not to encourage an Omega to be submissive, or to be controlled, but simply to regain trust in what their instincts are telling them. The goal is not, despite Hannibal's intentions otherwise, to force the Omega to pair-bond with the Alpha or woman treating them, but simply to open them up to the capability to bond at all. It is imperative that Omegas are able to pick out good Alphas from bad ones, otherwise their species would suffer dramatically. This is something else Hannibal truly believes.

It's simple logistics. He will not tolerate bad offspring from the result of damaged mates. It is imperative for the survival of the species that the breeding stock remain without imperfections.

"You have a place?" Will asks.

Hannibal blinks, and nods. "I own a cabin on the bay, a few hours away. Remote. Without distractions." Will presses his lips together, nods, sucks in a shaky breath.

"You already have permission from Jack," he says. "You wouldn't be asking if you didn't."

An assumption that it would not benefit Hannibal to disagree with. Frankly, if Will were a lower-profile asset, he might not have bothered with the formalities. Although, to whisk away an Omega without the permission of their legal guardian or relative is rude. So, perhaps he wouldn't have either way.

"Yes," he says instead of anything else. "You went into a rut state of mind, Will, and you've increased your suppressant medication to what I believe are dangerous levels. I know you don't want to feel anything, but this method will not solve the root problem."

"Trusting my *instincts*?" Will hisses, but the anger is focused inwardly. The same kind of insistent Alana gets when she knows Hannibal is right. They've been friends for a long time, long enough for Will to pick up on her mannerisms.

"You spend a lot of time in the minds of killers, Will," Hannibal says gently. He uncrosses his legs, puts both feet on the floor, and leans forward, his elbows on his knees. Will's eyes lift, he leans back like he thinks Hannibal is going to try and touch him, like Hannibal can even reach. He put his chairs farther apart after Franklyn's presumptuous touch and regrets the decision whenever Will is in the room. "I think it would benefit you greatly to be in your own for a while."

"Or in yours," Will whispers, sharp, bitter. His jaw flexes, he's gritting his teeth, and he wraps his fingers around the end of the armrests and slides forward so that he's mimicking Hannibal's position. "Do you think your mindset is any better, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal smiles. He doesn't back away. Unlike with any of his other patients, acquaintances, or friends, Hannibal finds himself inexplicably drawn to Will, to his warmth and his scent and the fantasies he indulges in when he's alone. "Perhaps you should think of this like your Doctor Greystone," he says. Will blinks at him. "You get into people's heads and that allows you to catch them when they hurt others. I get people into their own heads, and allow them to heal."

"Perfect equals and opposites," Will says, the corner of his mouth curving upward. "Is that how you see us, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal's eyes drop to Will's lips, the silence stretching on between them until Will huffs, sitting back. "I'll think about it," he says, elbow back on the armrest, thumbnail of his left hand scratching beneath his nose. "Assuming Jack has given you some leeway for patience."

"Jack has your best interests at heart, Will," Hannibal says, and Will rolls his eyes. "As do I."

Will scoffs. "He just wants to make sure I don't break his favorite toy," he replies, dark and bitter and Hannibal resolves that he will serve Will Jack's flesh for one of their anniversaries.

He had not been blind, nor willfully ignorant, of how Jack treats Will, but the more he invests himself in his plan and allows himself to indulge in thoughts of Will and his coming metamorphosis, he finds Jack's treatment of Will all the more intolerable.

Hannibal regards the display in front of him with a carefully impassive air. It's gaudy, garish, and lacks the finesse of his own work. He finds the same contempt in what he is seeing the same way he would regard an overcooked steak. There is potential here, of course, but the person who did it is too full of his own self, too confident in his own ability, to be appreciated as a master.

But that is not the most aggravating thing about the sight.

Will appears *enthralled*.

Hannibal did not kill this man. He did not open up his throat and feed the neck of a cello through his mouth, although he knows who this person is and what his crime was. He agrees with the punishment, begrudgingly.

Whether it is because Will is so thoroughly entrenched in the killer's mind, or it is his own opinion that is enchanted by the sight of the dead man, Hannibal cannot tell. Will moves around him like a predator stalking his prey, his eyes shining brightly under the glow of the stage lights. He'd been discovered by the stage manager.

"He's a trombone player for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra," Jack says, loud enough for Will to hear. Will nods, but his eyes don't stray from where the man's throat is opened up, exposing his vocal cords and trachea.

"This...takes a steady hand," he says, and rubs his hand, protected by a latex glove, across the lapel of the man's suit jacket. "A confidence. He's killed before," he whispers. Hannibal is starting to feel uncomfortable. If he thought himself low enough to feel such an emotion, he'd call it jealousy. "...But not like this."

Will closes his eyes, turns, grabs something in the sightlines of his own mind. His other hand slides up, cupping the neck of a cello or double bass, and he slides an invisible bow across it at the same height of the man's exposed throat. "This is a skilled musician trying a new instrument."

He lets his hands drop, opens his eyes. "This isn't how he kills. Not for an audience." His eyes flash up to Hannibal, then settle on Jack. "I believe he wants to show someone how well he plays."

Hannibal represses a smile. Will's tone is almost disgusted, the corner of his mouth twitching down sharply. Now that he has stepped out of the killer's mind, he sees the performance for what it is – smoke and mirrors. An adolescent's attempt at playing on the level of men.

Jack raises an eyebrow and Will takes a deep breath and turns back towards the man. He curls his fingers lightly under the exposed vocal cords and pulls back enough that they twang like the strings of an actual cello. "The strings have to be treated. You can't just open somebody up and draw a bow across their innards and expect to produce a sound. So," he adds,

straightening and pulling off his gloves, "you're looking for someone who knows what he's doing."

Jack nods, pressing his lips together, and turns towards where the stage manager is standing next to him. The man is an Omega, pale and squirrely, the kind of person Hannibal wouldn't even deign to pick out from between his teeth. "Who provides strings for the Orchestra?"

"I – I'll get you his contact information. His name is Tobias Budge. He runs a music shop in Baltimore."

"Good," Jack says, and the man nods rapidly and hurries away, Jack close behind. Will walks down the steps leading to the runway between seats and comes to a stop in front of Hannibal.

"Music shop," he mutters, looking back up to where the cello man is still sitting, gleaming white and red under the bright lights. It's warm in the theatre and Will's cheeks are flushed. When Hannibal takes a breath, lips just parted so that Will's scent drags over the roof of his mouth, he finds that Will's scent is not nearly as dull as normal.

The sight of this murder has excited him.

"Seems a little obvious, don't you think?" he asks, not noticing Hannibal's discreet scenting, and looks up at the Alpha, his eyebrows raised.

Hannibal swallows. "Not everyone can have the finesse of the Ripper," he says.

Will smiles at him, the gold in his eyes is practically *vibrant* today. Hannibal cocks his head to one side, but it would be rude to comment on Will's suppressant medication here, or the fact that the sight of this murderer's presentation has made him react in such a way. He resolves to wait until Will is calmer and, perhaps, at one of their sessions later this week.

Tobias Budge is certainly responsible for the murder of the trombone player. It is careless, to use one's own instrument to make a statement and not the one used by the victim. He might as well have painted a neon sign for the FBI and Hannibal to find him.

Sometimes, the art is in the silences, not in the noise.

He remembers meeting Tobias at the opera, Franklyn a nervous and jabbering Omega shadow at his side. Franklyn is an unfortunate case, and one of the Omegas Hannibal regards as too broken to tell a good Alpha from a bad one. His desire for familiarity with Hannibal and his clear adoration of Tobias is a clear indication that he is not fit to breed with.

Hannibal sends Will after Tobias for two reasons. The first is practical: he cannot be seen confronting the murderer himself. If Tobias were to disappear – or even more deliciously, end up as one of the Ripper's victims – it would only take so long for Will and Jack to figure out that he was responsible. Hannibal might be able to cite that it was an Alpha conflict over

territory, but there would be *questions* that rose up over what, exactly, Hannibal and Tobias were fighting over.

The second reason is that he hopes Tobias will trigger another episode in Will. If Will has lessened his suppression medication, his body will be more receptive to an Alpha's influence and if he is in distress, Hannibal is more than happy and able to soothe him, imprint his scent into Will's brain as something comforting and safe, and it will make his final surrender that much easier.

And, if Tobias kills Will, that will solve Hannibal's problem at the root. And then he'll rip Tobias apart and it will go as another unsolved Ripper murder, *c'est la vie*. He would miss Will terribly, but to mate oneself and to breed with an Omega incapable of holding his own against an Alpha? What a waste.

"I was looking forward to that. I wanted to kill him myself," Tobias says, his eyes rising from dispassionately regarding Franklyn's dead body.

Hannibal hums, dusting his hands off. "He was going to report you," he replies, and straightens the chair from the angle Franklyn's body had put it to when Tobias had made himself known in the room.

"He already did," Tobias says when Hannibal straightens up. "Police came after me." Then, his eyes narrow and he regards Hannibal with suspicion. The red in his eyes is glowing. "He hadn't reported me already?"

Hannibal smiles.

"I killed the policemen," Tobias says. "I wasn't going to tell anyone, about what you do and how *beautifully* you do it, but I guess..." He sighs, looks down at Franklyn again, and reaches into his pocket. "I suppose we're not destined to be as friendly as I'd hoped."

He pulls out a string, weighted on both ends with a slim piece of wood, and starts to spin it. Hannibal takes a step back, knowing too well how easily strings can cut through skin when contact is made at high speed. It seems a ridiculous weapon of choice.

Hannibal smells Will's blood, and he can't resist the urge to growl.

Tobias smiles. "So, he was yours, was he?" he says, his deep voice mocking. "Knew it."

He steps forward and Hannibal steps back, dodging when the string whizzes past his left side, then his right. He ducks behind the ladder and rolls it to the side, hoping to catch the string and stop the momentum, but Tobias has clearly killed this way before because he misses the ladder and runs for Hannibal again.

Hannibal grunts, lifting his arm to catch the string. His clothes save the initial cut, but when Tobias tightens it and pulls, he feels his skin split and warm blood welling up to stain his skin

and his sleeve. He grabs Tobias and throws him against the desk, lands a punch. But Tobias is strong and just as much an Alpha as he is. He's trying to get the string around Hannibal's neck and Hannibal can't allow that to happen.

A letter opener in his thigh, a pen in Tobias' arm, and the figure of a stag to the back of the head later, Tobias is dead. Hannibal knocks the little table on which the stag had been sitting over to make it look like an accident and heaves a deep breath. He tucks his handkerchief back into the pocket of his suit jacket.

His heart is racing, his jaw hurts from Tobias' fists and his thigh is sending splinters of pain up to his brain, but Hannibal feels *alive*. It has been so *long* since one of his kills put up a fight, since he was an Alpha fighting for his next meal, his next conquest, and not just an apex predator hunting prey animals for a slaughter.

He has the basic, overwhelming urge to roar, but swallows it back. This is not a victory, not yet. Will has yet to see it, has yet to know that two Alphas were fighting for the right to be the best, the victor over the other. Tobias knew Hannibal is the Ripper, he knew Will is Hannibal's intended, and he had come to fight for the right to claim him. As though, somehow, there is room for two killers and the Omega who can hunt them both down.

It's a victory and conquest so decadent that Hannibal's mouth is watering. His teeth itch to bury themselves in Will's throat. It's his right, as victor and dominant Alpha, to take Will over the bodies of his fallen rivals and soak the carpet in Will's slick as deeply stained as it is with Tobias' blood. His stomach is aching sharply – not just from punches, but from hunger and arousal in equal measure. He could dine for days on Tobias and Franklyn, feed his mate and burn the excess calories off in the frenzy of a heat. He could rut with Will brutally enough to break him, as high as he feels in this moment.

He paces his office until the scent of Tobias and Franklyn's bodies relieving themselves sour the scent, and his heart has stopped racing and his cock has gotten the message that, despite all of Hannibal's desires, there is no Omega here to knot and breed with.

He calls Jack's cell phone. He doesn't try to call Will. Jack will bring him if he's alive, or find his body if he's dead.

Hannibal does his best to ignore the fact that Tobias said 'he was yours'. *Was*, not *is*.

But Will has to survive. Hannibal will not allow for anything else.

Hannibal doesn't hear anything regarding Will's state until seven-thirty p.m. rolls around on a Wednesday evening and Will knocks on the door to his office. He opens it and his chest gets curiously tight when he sees Will, his eyes downcast as normal, his hair flat from the day's rain, holding his coat over one arm and tightly to his stomach.

Will lifts his eyes when Hannibal doesn't move away. He smiles – it's a warm and genuine expression. Will is incredibly lacking in fidgets or restlessness today. Hannibal recovers and takes a step back, allowing Will to step inside.

Will passes in front of him and Hannibal takes in a deep lungful of his scent. Mint and lemongrass. He narrowly resists the urge to touch Will and force him to be still so that he can be greedy with Will's scent. He closes the door behind Will and they both take their normal seats.

Will regards him for a long moment, before he smiles down at his hand. It's flat on the armrest, he's sitting with his back pressed flat against the support of the chair, his knees spread out. He looks open and unguarded, a fine feast for Hannibal to see and taste, an open invitation to a buffet tailored specifically for him.

He pulls his fingertips together. *Taptaptap*. "You've lessened your suppression medication," Hannibal finally says. Will's eyes flash up, glowing and golden and so beautiful, Hannibal wants to spend hours committing every detail to paper. He wants to memorize the glow of Will's golden ring, the shades of blue and the parts where the two mesh together and turn his eyes green. Michelangelo would weep when Hannibal was finished with his masterpiece.

Will's lips part, he sucks in a breath, then presses his lips together and shrugs. "Circumstances have changed," he says.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "Which ones would those be?"

"I could smell Tobias," Will says. Hannibal stifles the urge to growl at the name. "I walked into his shop and I...I *knew*." He jerks his chin, bares his teeth again, lifts his eyes to the ceiling. "I knew he was a killer. Not necessarily *my* killer, but I knew. And I did nothing. And now two good men are dead."

"Did he attack you?" Hannibal asks. His lip hurts when Will nods and shows him his bandaged hand, hidden under his coat. He wants to rip Tobias' throat out with his teeth and slow roast him until his meat falls off the bone. He lost his chance to do that. "He could have killed you, Will. He told me he *did* kill you. Why do you think he didn't?"

"I don't want -." Will growls, leans forward, puts his face in his hands. He growls into his palms and lifts his face, dragging his nails down his cheeks and jaw. "I don't want to *think* about that," he says tightly. The gold in his eyes flashes and he shoves himself to his feet, pacing to Hannibal's ladder. The wheels are locked and Will grabs one side of it and uses it to bear his weight. "I don't want to think about him, his Goddamn hands on me, the way he -."

He stops, sucking in a deep breath. Hannibal forces himself not to rise, although every part of him is burning to know what else Tobias *dared* to do to Will when Hannibal wasn't there to defend him or protect him. Not that Will needs protecting.

Will takes in a deep breath and opens his eyes, looking Hannibal's way. He doesn't meet Hannibal's eyes but watches him from his periphery, the back of his neck exposed, his shoulders tense. "I realized you were right," he says after another long pause. "I got too much

inside his head. I didn't react fast enough. I wasn't thinking enough like myself to realize what was happening."

"Is that why you reduced your suppressant dosage?" Hannibal asks.

Will swallows. "It's dangerous to go cold turkey," he replies. He turns his head away and wraps his fingers around one of the rungs of the ladder, looking up to the second floor. Then he lets go and paces back to his chair.

"Is this your way of saying you agree to my suggestion for behavioral therapy?" Hannibal asks, hardly able to keep the excitement out of his voice. Will regards him steadily, presses his lips together, and then looks away. His throat is red from the comparative heat of Hannibal's office. Hannibal has started to keep the temperature set a little higher than technically comfortable. No one has complained so far, except Franklyn.

He likes the flush of heat on Will's skin, the pink in his cheeks and the way his hair curls against his neck when it's damp. He's so unbearably sweet to look at. It makes Hannibal's teeth feel too sharp in his mouth.

"I have to ask..." Will bites his lower lip, his cheeks coloring from more than just warmth, and he looks back at Hannibal and meets his eyes. It's coy, shy almost. "This is...*purely* for the sake of therapy, right?"

Hannibal smiles. "Professional curiosity," he replies, and Will huffs a soft laugh. He smiles back, smug and nervous all at once. Hannibal has the feeling that, once again, he has lost a game he hadn't known he was playing.

"What would you recommend as a timeline for weaning off of suppression meds?" Will asks.

"That would depend on the dosage you were on, the brand, and how long you were using it."

Will nods. "I'll bring it to you next session," he says. "Don't remember the exact numbers off the top of my head."

Hannibal nods, allowing Will to lie without comment. He is not sure what Will hopes to gain by delaying this information – perhaps he wants to know what Hannibal will say and then compare it to other doctors to make sure *Hannibal* isn't lying. Will is naturally gun-shy after his run-in with Tobias, but Hannibal had never thought of him as an Omega to be *cowed*.

"I think lessening your dose has already made improvement," he says lightly, as the silence stretches on a little too long.

Will nods, biting his lower lip again. "I'm sleeping better, at least," he replies. "But I..."

"Yes?" Hannibal presses when Will falls silent.

Will shakes his head. "Nothing," he says, rubbing over his jaw and scratching at his beard. "I guess I should go home and pack. How long do you think it'll take?"

"It's hard to say," Hannibal replies. "One might argue that therapy never really ends."

Will makes a soft, bitter sound, his eyes on his fingers. *Taptaptap*. "Please, don't sugarcoat the truth for me, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs, his smile shaky, uneven, and borderline feral. Hannibal feels a warmth in him that has nothing to do with the heat.

He smiles.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Getting a little NSFW now.

That Thursday, the night after Will agrees to go with him to begin behavioral therapy, Hannibal makes plans for a dinner party. He cannot allow the meat he has in his stores to spoil, after all, and this will be a good place to inform those he regularly mingles with that he is officially off the market. It will serve the purpose of ensuring that they desist in throwing their Omega children and their daughters at him, and serve to ruffle feathers of people too polite to show their judgement towards his choice of mate.

Hannibal knows that, as far as mates go, Will is categorically lesser. He does not have a pack Alpha or parents capable of paying a sizable dowry, he does not come from means, and he lives alone with a pack of dogs and works for the *Government*. He does not enjoy the finer things in life because he has not been bred and refined to enjoy them.

His presentation leaves a lot to be desired – at least, the persona he wears to navigate his everyday life does. Will possesses the natural beauty most Omegas are blessed with. His eyes are expressive and bright, his neck is a graceful arch that begs an Alpha to sink his teeth into the rich artery there. He is strong in the shoulders, his thighs thick from standing in deep moving water to fish, he is healthy enough to wrestle with and chase his dogs, to corral them when needed, and he has enough dominance in him to impress himself as leader within his own self-made pack.

Of course, this is not what draws Hannibal to him so ardently. It is Will's mind, his all-seeing eyes that are somehow blind to him, and his sharp tongue that truly marks him as someone worthy of Hannibal's seed and offspring.

Like Will, Hannibal has been giving a lot of thought to family. He dreams of going hunting with Will, of letting his beautiful mate lure their kills close with his soft lips and off-kilter, welcoming smile. He dreams of letting Will seduce a rival Alpha, of letting a filthy half-breed between his clothed thighs, of prowling up behind that man and slicing his throat and bathing Will in his blood. He dreams of licking Will clean afterwards, of mixing the blood with Will's slick when he knots his mate over the cooling body of their kill.

When Hannibal wakes Friday morning, his cock is hard and demanding his attention. He has his scarf, the one he had rubbed Will's sweat on at the hotel, against his mouth and over his nose as he touches himself, imagines that Will is there with him, whining sweetly in his ear and his tight, beautiful body wrapped around Hannibal's cock.

He imagines that Will is wild, just as often as he imagines Will so sweet and pliant that Hannibal can move him how he sees fit. He has the strength to hold Will down, pin him with his nails at Will's wrists and his teeth in Will's neck, sinking deeply into the most vulnerable parts of him. He could hold Will by the hair and force his knot behind Will's teeth, but that would be a waste of his seed when it could be planted deep inside of Will once he's fertile and receptive. Hannibal has no doubt he will smell it the second Will is able to become pregnant.

Hannibal comes with a low roar, imagining Will caked in blood from Hannibal's nails. Hannibal would never harm his face, never mar his beautiful neck beyond what is necessary, but the rest of him is destined to become a feast for Hannibal's teeth and his hands. He will bite Will, suck bruises to his neck and his chest, the pale and vulnerable expanse of his thighs. He will claw wild noises from Will's throat and render him mute from begging and pleading with Hannibal to sate the desires raging in his body.

He will do it the moment Will lets Hannibal shave his face, for no Omega will allow an Alpha near their neck unless they intend to accept an Alpha's touch everywhere else. He will cup Will's throat, feel the smoothness of his clean-shaven skin, and bite the pressure points on his nape that will make Will drop to his knees and soak himself in his slick.

He collects his seed and carefully siphons it into one of the barrels he keeps for Alana's brew. This one will be especially for Will, if he deigns to accept Hannibal's invitation to dinner Friday night. If he does not, Hannibal will take it with them to the cabin.

The presence of an Alpha's hormones in an Omega's food will coax them into heat more quickly. Even with his suppressants, deadening Will's scent and souring his body's ability to conceive, his lizard brain will understand that there is an Alpha providing for him, feeding and wining him and caring for him when the time comes.

He does not wash his hands before preparing the food. Alana and his sous-chefs are all women, so they will not be able to smell or react to the Alpha hormones in the food or in the air. He admits he makes the food more extravagant than he is renowned for, wanting to show his intended that he is the pinnacle of excellence as a mate and provider.

Will arrives with Jack, half an hour later than the appointed time. Hannibal would scold them for being late, but he refrains from doing so when he sees Will. Both Jack and Will have dressed well for the occasion and Jack brings a bottle of fine port that will pair well with the desert Hannibal has made. He accepts the offer graciously and guides them both into the main room, where Hannibal's assistants have already begun offering small finger food courses to warm up everyone's bellies for the main event.

One of his assistants offers Will and Jack glasses of wine. Hannibal can smell the sweet cherry taste he gave Will's personal store and is glad that his assistants are adhering to his command that Will is to only be served his select wine.

Will's eyes flash when he lifts the glass to his nose, breathing deeply. "Cherries?" he asks.

"Accommodating a natural sweet tooth," Hannibal replies with a cordial smile. The ring of gold in Will's eyes is even brighter in the low light. He's the only Omega guest here tonight

and Hannibal knows he might garner enough interest, either direct or sidelong, from Hannibal's other guests. His teeth start to itch. It will be very entertaining, watching Will navigate the bluebloods of Baltimore.

"Hannibal, you *must* introduce me to your guest over there."

Hannibal raises his eyes to where the Alpha is gesturing, smiling into his wine glass when he sees the object of this man's attention is none other than Will Graham. Will's cheeks are flushed from warmth and alcohol and he appears in quiet conversation with Alana and Madame Fisher, a woman who wears pearls like sweat stains and smiles wide enough to show every part of her gums. Will has, he noticed, stayed mostly by Jack or Alana's side and only has engaged in conversations with women.

The high life of Baltimore navigates the same was as Regency Europe – it is unquestionably rude to approach an Omega without an introduction from that Omega's pack Alpha, mate, or parent, and especially so, if that Omega is unmated. Hannibal and Jack are the only Alphas that would be presumed to have a prior connection to Will, and therefore have the authority to introduce him to others.

The Alpha in question – Mister Sawyer – is an absolute bore, in Hannibal's opinion, and far too cavalier with his so-called 'mastery' of Omega liberation movements. It would be interesting to see how Will reacts to him.

"I will see if he is amenable," Hannibal replies smoothly, his smile just wide enough to show teeth, to warn Mister Sawyer of becoming too familiar before his time, and the Alpha nods as Hannibal leaves him and approaches Will.

Will cocks his head to one side, like he felt Hannibal's eyes on him and gifts him with the barest amount of peripheral vision. Alana and Madame Fisher step away, naturally deferential to Hannibal's status as host.

"I was hoping I might borrow Will for a moment," Hannibal says, and places his free hand just upwards of the small of Will's back. It is an experiment, to see if Will rejects his touch. Will doesn't move except to turn his face a little more towards Hannibal, his eyes respectfully lowered to Hannibal's chin. "I have a friend who is very interested in meeting you."

Alana presses her lips together, as though holding her tongue, her eyes on Will and ready to spirit him away if Will should decline. Alana does not think Hannibal would force Will, she knows both of them too well, but she is also familiar with Will's ingrained ability to sense a challenge, as well as his sometimes unfortunate tendency to rise to one.

Will smiles. The wine has made him pliant and sweet. Hannibal can smell him so well despite the cloud of guests in his rooms, and marvels again that Will has allowed him to remain so close for such a prolonged period of time without turning to hide his neck or step away from the touch on his back.

"I'd be delighted," he says, stilted but accommodating, and Hannibal bids the ladies adieu with another smile and steps back, subtly guiding Will by his touch on Will's back towards Mister Sawyer.

"Will Graham, this is a good friend of mine," Hannibal says, though he scarcely remembers the man's first name. "Gregory Sawyer. Mister Sawyer has pioneered many the liberation movement in his time. He works primarily out of Washington, as a liaison with the Omega Liberation Society and Congress."

"Impressive," Will says, his politeness just covering the icy tone and the subtly disgusted tilt to his smile. Hannibal swallows back the purr and finally forces his hand from Will's back. Will takes another sip of his wine. It's not his first glass and it's almost empty.

It is traditional for the introducing Alpha to remain with a new connection for a while, providing the two unfamiliar parties a common interest to bond over.

"How do you know Doctor Lecter?" Will finally asks, his eyes raised to meet Mister Sawyer's and held there. Oh, Hannibal wants to drink the soft growl he is sure is sitting at the base of Will's throat. Will is reserved most of the time but his entire demeanor is cold, so unlike how he is with Hannibal. He wonders if Will thinks Hannibal allowed this introduction because of Mister Sawyer's career, or if it is just coincidence.

Mister Sawyer laughs, an overly-familiar hand landing on Hannibal's shoulder. The man is red-cheeked from alcohol and his breath smells like old bread. "Oh, Hannibal and I go way back," he says. "Back in the days when Hannibal was a surgeon."

"Were you a doctor, too?" Will asks. His head is tilted to one side, inadvertently showing Hannibal more of his neck. His stance relaxes somewhat, enough that Hannibal, as close and as fine-tuned to Will as he is, notices.

"No, nothing of the sort. Don't have the stomach for that sort of thing. How do you know Hannibal?"

Will's eyes flash. *Weakness*. Hannibal sees Will's gaze drop to the man's throat, then back up. He licks his lips and forces a smile.

"You don't have the stomach for that sort of thing," he says, clipped and icy.

Hannibal can't stop the purr this time. It lasts for less than a second but he sees Will's mouth twitch into a smile at the corners. Mister Sawyer, to his credit, finds Will's rudeness amusing – but in the condescending, paternal way. The same kind of amusement a father has when hearing his children swear.

"Oh! What a fiery tongue! It's a wonder an Alpha hasn't snatched you up yet."

In this kind of society, that sort of remark is as brazen as a smack across the face. Whether Will knows that or not, he doesn't let his reaction show, although Hannibal is sure Will's all-seeing eyes know exactly how Mister Sawyer intended his words to be heard.

Will smiles. "Tell me, Mister Sawyer," he says, and takes a small step forward and rests a hand on the Alpha's chest. "Would you want an Omega that has spent less than five minutes in your company and already imagined dozens of different ways to watch you die?"

Mister Sawyer's eyes widen and his breath catches in his throat. His eyes flash to Hannibal, equal parts embarrassment and worry crossing his thick-jowled face.

"Will is a criminal profiler for the FBI," Hannibal says, unable to keep himself smiling. Will pats Mister Sawyer's lapel and withdraws his hand, cupping both hands around his wine glass as he takes another sip. "He works under the director of the Behavioral Science Unit and assists him in catching serial killers."

"Is that so?" Mister Sawyer says weakly, taking a sip of his glass of scotch. His fingers are shaking finely. "What an...unusual career prospect. Honorable."

"I'm happy you think so," Will replies, his smile genuine but sharp. He turns to Hannibal and holds up his empty wine glass. "Forgive me, I'm not well-versed in exiting conversations with the same politeness Mister Sawyer has shown me, so I'll just say that my glass is empty and I think everyone would benefit from having it remain full."

If Will was already his, Hannibal would kiss him. Instead he offers Mister Sawyer a polite smile and puts a hand on Will's back once more. "If you'll excuse us," he says, and Mister Sawyer allows them to pass by with a somewhat relieved nod.

The kitchen is a sacred and secret place during one of Hannibal's parties, but Hannibal guides Will towards it. It is empty, as his assistants are busying themselves setting out the courses for the main event.

Will lets out an explosive, angry breath, setting his glass down. He looks like he does it for the sake of the poor thing, lest he choose to throw it across the room instead. Hannibal takes his larger bottle of Will's store from the fridge and opens it, pouring Will another glass.

"Was that another aspect of your *therapy*, Doctor Lecter? Will hisses, the venom he had so barely held back pouring out of him now.

"I assure you, Will, that introduction was innocent," Hannibal replies. The bottle is empty when Will's glass is full, so he sets it to one side by the sink for later. "Mister Sawyer asked me to introduce you to him, and I obliged."

Will regards him for a long moment, before he takes his glass and swallows a large gulp from it. Hannibal allows the brief moment to set his gluttonous gaze on Will's exposed neck, and straightens when Will rights himself and sets the glass back down.

He sighs, rubbing his hand over his mouth. "I shouldn't have been so rude," he says, a half-apology. "These are your friends."

"They are people who expect an invitation to such events," Hannibal replies. "Not the same thing. I consider *you* my friend, Will, and your happiness and comfort are paramount to me."

"If I was happy and comfortable, we wouldn't know each other," Will says darkly. "You would be another faceless name Jack likes to throw around to impress people."

"Then perhaps the best way to spite him would be to remain familiar with each other after you're cured."

Will's eyes flash up, meeting Hannibal's. He bites his lip and turns his face away, towards the door, as though only just realizing that they're alone in the room. His demeanor bears a nervousness Hannibal hasn't seen in him before. After all, they've been alone together for extended periods of time in the past. It's almost as if Will senses a trap.

He licks his lips, presses them together, and scratches his fingers over his neck.

His eyes dart to Hannibal, then away. "I can speak freely to you, can't I?" he whispers. "You're not allowed to tell Jack anything I say. Confidentiality and all that."

"I would never betray your thoughts to Jack, Will," Hannibal replies.

After another moment, Will nods, and his shoulders slump. "I don't want to go back out there," he confesses, closing his eyes. "Every fake laugh and cheap smile makes me want to rip out their tongues through their *teeth*. How do you stand it?"

Hannibal huffs a laugh. There is a decanter of red wine on the kitchen island that is for the general population and he pours himself a glass of it. If Will notices that his brew is a special kind, or questions it, he keeps it to himself.

"I'm afraid bad breeding begets bad breeding," Hannibal says. "I was raised with money and status, and as such, when I came to America, I was expected to befriend the same. Most of these people's parents know my parents, or my teachers."

"I'm not sure if you're saying they're a result of bad breeding, or I am," Will mutters.

Hannibal smiles. "I don't mean to offend you, Will."

"Deflecting," Will says. Then he offers a small smile, tilts his head, and looks back down at his wineglass. "I figured out what meds I was on, and the dose."

Hannibal blinks, but accepts the change of topic without comment.

"It can wait," Will says.

"You brought it up for a reason," Hannibal notes, but doesn't press a physical or verbal advantage. This is a delicate stage for Will's metamorphosis, and one wrong move could bring all of Hannibal's grand designs crashing down around his ears. Although he desperately wants to take advantage of their solitude, steal another touch of Will's heat or, even better, a breath of his scent, he knows he cannot make a move without explicit invitation.

It is rude to address an Omega without introduction. So, too, would it be socially poor of Hannibal to touch Will without knowing he will be well-received.

Will's sigh drags him out of his thoughts. "It's an O.A. suppressor. They were five hundred milligrams each. I was taking two every four hours when I was awake."

Hannibal can't help the startled, worried sound he lets out, but he thinks it's advantageous because Will looks at him like he's expecting to be scolded. His shoulders curl in and he ducks his gaze even further as though expecting a blow.

This is an opportunity for Hannibal to appear nurturing, instead of controlling.

"Will," he begins, and tries to make his voice as gentle as he can. Will doesn't react. Hannibal sets his wine glass down and rounds the kitchen counter, coming to a stop a step away from Will's side. Will's eyes follow him, downcast but aware all the same. Hannibal hesitates. He needs to choose his next words *very* carefully.

Will has a brightness in his eyes, almost like fear, and when Hannibal takes his next breath in, he smells salt water – tears. "I didn't mean to let it get that bad," Will says. His hands are trembling and he presses them flat against the top of the kitchen island, heaving in an unsteady breath. "I just kept – I kept getting worse and they were the only things helping me and -."

Hannibal shushes him, and whether it was a carefully calculated move on his part, or pure instinct pulling him forward, he wouldn't have been able to say. All he knows is that one moment he was a respectful distance from Will's side and the next he has a hand in Will's soft curls, his other hand gently flattening across the jut of Will's collarbones, and his chest is pressed against Will's arm.

Will's hair is different without being sodden with sweat. It's almost unbearably soft, thick in Hannibal's hand, begging to be pulled and twisted. Hannibal images Will on his knees, submitting to every tug and twist of Hannibal's hands with his mouth wrapped around Hannibal's cock.

Hannibal deliberately doesn't touch the back of his neck, but lets his hand naturally fall against the curve of Will's neck and his spine, putting weight there in a meek imitation. It works – Will takes in a deep breath, lets it out shakily, but the soft whine he had been letting out goes quiet.

He spreads his hand out wide along Will's skull, and Will's hair melts between his fingers and curls against his palm and his wrist. Will shivers, naturally placated by the touch to his hair and the weight of Hannibal's arm against his back. Hannibal's other hand is doing the job of providing support, in case Will is sensitive enough to go to his knees at such a touch. Hannibal cannot touch his throat, that is too presumptuous and too hasty at this point in the courtship, but he can put pressure just below and feel Will's racing heart against his palm.

Will sucks in another breath and Hannibal chases the air between them, lets Will abstractly acknowledge his height, his strength, and the scent Hannibal had so painstakingly woven around Will's house so that Will associates his scent with safety. Combined with Hannibal's seed in Will's drink, he's sure it's a feeling Will is having from the inside out.

It takes all of Hannibal's willpower not to press his face to Will's hair, drink in the delicious tang of distress in his scent, not to slide his hand up to Will's throat and his other hand to Will's nape and place *just* enough choking pressure to make him submit. He could mount and bite Will right here – everyone knows not to enter the kitchen, and Hannibal's assistants will be busy keeping his guests' drinks full and guiding them to the dining room. He could do it, and Will would be powerless to stop him.

But he *can't*. It is frustrating, maddening. His teeth itch to sever Will's skin, his tongue is dry and desperate for the taste of Will's blood in his mouth.

He only realizes he's purring when Will shivers and turns his head, as though he wants to press his ear to Hannibal's chest to hear the rumble stuck there. Will bites his lip and his fingers curl, and he straightens up, and Hannibal lets him go.

Will's cheeks are a very dark red now – something that has nothing to do with the wine – and Hannibal can smell his slick *just* so, like the aftertaste in spiced rum. The gold in his eyes is so incredibly vibrant, as beautiful as the gold inside of the baptistery next to Florence's *Cathedral of Santa Mara del Fiore*.

"I...think I've had too much wine, Doctor Lecter," he says, and bites his lip and takes his glass of wine, finishing it with another long swallow that bares his neck and creates a montage of very improper images in Hannibal's mind. "Thank you for inviting me, but I should leave."

Hannibal nods, taking another step back. "I would recommend lowering your dosage to one pill every twelve hours, as is prescribed," he says.

Will clears his throat, looking down. "I already have," he replies.

Hannibal opens his mouth to reply, but then Alana pushes into his kitchen and screeches to a halt when she sees the two of them. Will offers her a shaky smile and Alana's jaw clenches. She looks at Hannibal with thinly-veiled accusation, and Hannibal simply shrugs and returns to his wine glass on the other side of the kitchen counter.

"Alana, would you mind driving me home?" Will asks.

"Of course," Alana says with another sharp look Hannibal's way. He supposes it's a good thing she was the one to interrupt them, not Jack or another Alpha who would be able to smell how affected Will is and how Hannibal's own thoughts have been less than savory during their brief, secret meeting.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Doctor Lecter," Will says over his shoulder, before Alana herds him out of the kitchen with one final look. Hannibal huffs a breath through his nose, but the reminder has heartened him; tomorrow he is scheduled to pick Will up from his house and take him up to his cabin, and their therapy can begin in earnest.

He leaves the kitchen and heads into the dining room, spending just enough time in his kitchen and living space to work off the excess energy Will's presence always brings him and

to be sure he does not smell too offensively of the Omega or his own desires. Then, he enters the dining room.

"I apologize for keeping you all waiting," he says by way of announcement, quieting the conversations between those gathered. He takes his place at the head of the table and begins listing off the dishes he has prepared. The Omega's organs and the Alpha's meat, and pieces of both of them beam back at him from their gleaming white plates spread out along the table.

"I must warn you," he adds, pausing for the kind of dramatic flair his guests so enjoy. "Nothing here is vegetarian."

They laugh, bleating like sheep, and he smiles and sits down. During the course of the meal, he imagines he is feeding Will these fine things he has cooked. He imagines that Will knows, shares secret smiles and technically-not-incriminating jokes over their kills. He imagines how Will might moan with delight when he's fed bacon made from Jack's belly.

Most Omegas tend to crave meat during their pregnancy and directly after their heats, and Hannibal has every intention of making sure Will is *very* well-fed.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry this chapter took so long to get out! If you follow me on Tumblr, you'll know I had a pretty awful stomach bug the past few days and I've been mostly sleeping, but I finally got my energy back today.

Enjoy some cabin times! :D

Hannibal is completely unsurprised to see Jack and Alana's cars outside of Will's house when he pulls up, packed and ready to spirit the Omega away to his cabin. It would be poor manners and tenuous, legality-wise, to take Jack's charge away without the proper paperwork, which he is sure Jack has now. And after the way Alana had looked at him in his kitchen last night, it's no shock to him that she insinuated herself into the whole morning.

Not surprising, but aggravating nonetheless. Hannibal pulls up behind Will's car and turns off the engine. Allowing the innards to cool will bring a lovely flush to Will's cheeks once he gets warm again, and Hannibal will admit he has a soft spot for the scent of Will's blood so close to the surface of his skin.

He approaches the porch and hears Will's dogs barking, a second before the door opens and they all come barreling out. Alana is standing in the doorway, and regards him with a calm mix of resignation and warning.

"Hannibal," she greets, and steps back to allow him inside.

"Good morning, Alana," Hannibal replies. She's wearing the same clothes as she had been wearing at his dinner party. "You were missed last night."

"Will called me from the car," Jack says, drawing Hannibal's attention to him. He's standing next to the little desk on which Will makes his fishing lures, a folder clasped over his belly in both hands. He's still wearing his thick black jacket and gloves – either he has not been here long, or has no intention of staying. "I asked Alana to stay with him."

Hannibal smiles. "How fortunate it is that Will has so many ardent and loyal friends," he says. Jack huffs and Alana's jaw bulges at the corner. It is then that Hannibal makes a show of noticing the very *lack* of the homeowner in their company. "Where is Will?"

"I'm here." It's Will's voice, and Hannibal turns to see him dragging a suitcase behind him, down the stairs. Will looks tired, there are dark circles under his eyes and his face is pale, his hair flat and greasy. But he is holding his own weight and in present company Hannibal decides it would be counterproductive to go over and help Will down the stairs.

Alana, it seems, has no such qualms. She rushes over and tries to take his bag and Will lets her, huffing a bitter, low noise. "I'm fine," he says.

"No, you're not," she replies, and this time her glare is focused on Jack.

Will presses his lips together and looks like he resists the urge to roll his eyes, but he allows her to carry his bag out to Hannibal's car. Hannibal unlocks it from inside the house and then turns to Jack as Jack approaches him, his folder extended for Hannibal.

Hannibal knows what's inside. It is Jack's signature, permitting Hannibal to essentially take over Will's legal guardianship for the duration of the therapy. Of course, by the time the therapy is done, Hannibal will own much more of Will than his name, but that is a detail that Jack need not know. He smiles and opens the folder, checking that everything is in place – legal rights to Will's suppressant medication prescription and monitoring; permission to exercise any legal, ethical, and moral psychiatric practice in the pursuit of Will's recovery; a written note for leave of absence while Will is in treatment.

"You're very thorough, Jack," Hannibal says, closing the folder.

Jack gives a shrug that tries to look self-deprecating, but his smile is smug. "Want to make sure I cover all my bases." He hesitates, and looks outside. Hannibal joins him. Will is on his knees in the snow, petting his dogs while Alana stands behind Hannibal's car with a look like she's debating slashing the tires to delay their departure.

Will's joy around his pack lights up his face, brings youth to his brow and color to his cheeks, makes his eyes shine. Hannibal thinks of how he'll look when their children are old enough to play like pets, and smiles.

"Do take care of him, Hannibal," Jack says, too quiet to be a real warning, not stern enough to hide his sorrow.

"I promise you, Jack," Hannibal replies, "I shall treat Will as delicately as I am able."

They cross the border into Maryland and Will sighs. He has his forehead pressed against the window as before, his hands tucked between his thighs to shield them from the cold. His neck is exposed and pink, his cheeks red from the abrasive heat of Hannibal's car. He'd been dozing most of the morning, clearly exhausted. Hannibal has never minded Will's silences, and with Will being mostly asleep, it has given him plenty of time to breathe in the Omega's scent freely, without fear of being noticed.

Will straightens, pinching the bridge of his nose with all fingers on one side, thumb on the other, and slides them down and across the hard line of his eye sockets, before he wipes his hand over his mouth and opens his eyes.

"I believe you mentioned you had been sleeping better since reducing your medication," Hannibal says when Will doesn't otherwise make any attempt at starting conversation.

Will bares his teeth, his smile off-kilter, and looks down at his knees. "Yeah," he replies. Then he swallows and licks his lips. "Wasn't the pills keepin' me awake last night."

"Nightmares?" Hannibal guesses.

"Of a sort."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, but doesn't press. The important thing to know about Will is that he is very, *very* good at luring people into conversation. They are intrigued by him – naturally, of course – and he forces them to volunteer more information, give up more weaknesses, before they realize he's got them on the hook. But Hannibal is a good hunter, and knows the importance of patience. He can stalk his prey for weeks if he has to.

Will licks his lips again, scratches his fingers through the scruff on his jaw. "Alana kissed me last night," he says. *That* catches Hannibal's attention, but he forces himself to keep his expression schooled and neutral. In all honesty he's not sure how well he succeeds, but Will isn't looking at him.

But he must choose his responses very carefully. He has already lost verbal bouts with Will and cannot afford to lose again when his plan is finally coming together so nicely. "She is very protective of you," he finally decides to say.

Will scoffs. "She's not attracted to me," he says.

"I respectfully disagree. Her pheromones are subtle, but they're there." Will is silent for a moment. "Are you attracted to her?"

Will sighs, sitting forward so his hands are on his knees. "I mean, she's beautiful. And she has all the right things that would make her a good mate, but..." He shakes his head and lets out a soft, distressed-sounding whine. Hannibal clenches his hand on the steering wheel to resist the urge to pet through Will's hair and soothe him.

"What did you dream about, Will?" he asks.

Will takes in a deep, shuddering breath, and raises his head to look out of the windshield. But his gaze is unfocused. He's not wearing his glasses and the snow has made his eyes a pretty, bright blue. "When she touched me, all I could think about was her hands," he says.

"Her hands?"

Will bites his lower lip and nods, then looks down at his own. His fingers curl tight enough to whiten the knuckles. "The Ripper is a killer," he says. His words are framed by his teeth, bared like he's fighting the urge to snarl. "He has...a killer's hands. And she doesn't."

Hannibal hums. "You have inferred before that you see yourself as a possible object of the Ripper's desires," he says.

Will huffs, closing his eyes. "Indirectly."

"You find comfort in the idea of a mate who does not want to intimidate you. Alana cannot intimidate you, but she also cannot impress you. She lacks the chemistry."

"Are you trying to make me feel better, or yourself, Doctor Lecter?"

There is it. That fiery tone, the sour venom on Will's tongue that Hannibal so eagerly indulges in. He smiles.

"I am trying to help you decipher why Alana kissing you gave you such terrible nightmares. We don't have to talk about that if you don't want to."

"But *you* want to," Will says. "Don't you ever get tired of being in someone else's head?"

"Never," Hannibal murmurs. Traffic has started to build up and he slows the car, sliding into place within the traffic as they begin to navigate the complex web of roads between here and the bay.

Will is silent for a long time, as though fearing that their neighbors in the mid-morning rush would hear his whispered confessions. Finally, when the traffic starts to clear, he sighs and sits back, tilting his head up to stare at the roof of the car.

"In my dream, Alana died because she kissed me," he says. "The Ripper knew, and he pulled her apart like roasted pig."

Hannibal doesn't reply.

"She didn't stand a chance against him," Will continues. His neck is bared and his eyes are closed and he's not wearing any of his scent-deadening shampoo, presumably because he sweated the chemicals off and didn't have time to shower. It's maddening, and Hannibal shifts his weight in his seat and tries to focus on not hitting any of the cars in front of him.

"Tell me, Will, did the Ripper have your face in this dream?"

Will smiles. It's the same smile he had in the gym at the hotel – borderline feral and more angry than happy. Satisfied. "Why do you ask?"

"You have been spending a lot of time in the Ripper's head," Hannibal says. "I'm merely curious if you see yourself with his hands, too."

Will laughs. It's a startlingly happy sound, light and low. "No," he replies. "He didn't have my face." He opens his eyes and Hannibal feels Will's gaze on the side of his face. He turns, for a brief second, to meet Will's eyes, before his attention must be put back on the road.

Will reaches out, suddenly but slowly, and brushes the tips of his fingers across Hannibal's knuckles. He still has a bandage around his hand from Tobias' string, and he touches the remnants of bruises from when Hannibal struck Tobias across the jaw.

Hannibal's eyes drop to the action. He can't think of a single thing to say, and then Will's touch withdraws and he turns in his seat, putting his back to Hannibal and pulling his scarf up around his neck, making a pillow of his arm to rest his head against.

"Wake me when we're there," he says, and Hannibal nods although Will can't see him. He flexes his fingers, curling them tightly. His hand feels like it's burning and he has the completely ridiculous and overwhelming feeling that the only way to cool it down would be to put his hand on Will's nape and up through his hair.

He turns the heat down and presses his knuckles against the window of his car.

Hannibal's cabin is exactly the kind of thing city folk spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on, to entertain their idyllic whims of being in the woods without sacrificing all of the comforts. The place is open-plan and bright with sunlight during the day, which will soothe Will's instinctive fear of being trapped, and at night the sounds of the ocean, cicadas, and the sparkling lights of fireflies will create a warm and peaceful atmosphere.

Will raises his eyebrows when he steps out of the car. He's pink-cheeked and disheveled from sleep, his eyelids droopy and his hair ruffled. He doesn't say anything about the place, either complimentary or negative, but assists Hannibal with unloading their bags and carrying them inside.

Hannibal had made sure the place would be stocked with food, coffee, and wine, in preparation for Will's arrival. Since he had begun putting his plan into place, he had known that the time between suggesting behavioral therapy to Will and actually getting him here had to be as minimal as possible. Will is an Omega who has a lot of time to think, and the more he thinks, the more he sees.

Hannibal smiles, straightening up when the car is safely docked on the driveway and all of their bags are inside. He claps his hands together, drawing Will's attention. "Shall I give you the tour?" he asks.

Will nods, and Hannibal gestures for him to pass by and into the open living room. There is a large fireplace in the center, feeding to the chimney that passes from this floor, frames the edge of the second floor, and disappears into the roof. The couches are soft and fluffed, the same maker who made these also made the chairs in Hannibal's study.

Will idly trails his fingers across the edge of the piano and hums, looking up. "Down the hall there is the guest bathroom," Hannibal says, gesturing to the left of the chimney where the hallway extends to a set of two doors. "And the pantry. Upstairs..." He climbs the staircase and doesn't look back to see if Will follows, but is pleased when he comes to a stop and feels the Omega's heat behind him. "To the right is my room," he says, gesturing to the first door. There is very little hallway between it and the staircase.

"First line of sight," he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles. "You will have the guest room," he says, and steps forward so that Will has space to pass him and cross the hallway to the left, where there is a closed door. Will reaches for the handle, then hesitates, and takes a deep breath in like he's scenting the air. He frowns.

He turns the handle and yanks the door open almost savagely, as though expecting a trap. Hannibal swallows back the purr when he sees Will's eyes widen, his lips part in shock. The natural daylight streaming in through the window opposite the door lights up his face, bathes him in it like the touch of a covetous lover, and he swallows and steps into the room.

Hannibal crosses to the door and watches as Will walks with slow, deliberate steps into the middle of the room. The walls are painted a pale blue, the baseboards are gold, and the floor is light wood. This specific color palette is very attractive to Omegas, he knows – the gold reminds them of their kind, and blue has been proven in studies to be a color that promotes trust and relaxation.

In the center of the room is a giant pile of sheets, blankets, and cushions atop a single bare mattress pushed into the corner where the light won't shine first thing in the morning. Will comes to a stop at the edge of the mattress and stares at the pile.

Then, he reaches out, his fingers shaking finely, and picks up the top blanket. It's fleeced, a stone-grey color, and he presses it over his nose and mouth and breathes in deeply. Hannibal had worn his plastic suit during his acquisition of most of the items, so he knows that there is going to be very little of his scent on the blankets. It won't remain that way for long, but for now, to gain Will's trust, Hannibal must exercise a certain amount of restraint.

"Holy shit," Will says, gasping the words, and lowers the blanket, clutching it to his stomach like he's holding his innards within his hands. He turns and meets Hannibal's eyes. "I haven't had a nest since I was a teenager."

Hannibal smiles. "Consider it an exercise," he says. "As part of your therapy. Nests are an important tool for Omegas. The more you go through therapy and reconnect with your instincts, the more important the nest will be."

"Hannibal, I -" Hannibal swallows. He can't remember the last time someone said his name with such reverence, but the times when Will calls him by name are so few and far between, he feels it in his chest when his name escapes Will's mouth, soft and shivering like a newborn lamb. Will raises his eyes again, from the nest to Hannibal. "Thank you."

Hannibal forces himself to straighten up, not to join Will in his room and take him by the neck and demand Will show his gratitude the best way his species knows how. That can wait. Will is a good lure, but Hannibal is a better hunter.

"I'll leave you to it," he says. "Dinner is at seven. Rest, unpack, get settled in."

Will nods, ducking his eyes again, and Hannibal closes the door almost all the way and heads towards the stairs. He hesitates, and goes into his room instead. His room in comparison is almost *stuffed*. His bed is large enough to easily fit four people comfortably, the sheets a dark red and the duvet black and gold. The walls are white, the wood dark, heavy curtains drawn

across the floor-to-ceiling windows to keep the sun out in the morning. He has dressers from the same black wood, a built-in closet, and the en-suite bathroom.

Omegas do not need so much space, nor do they need to pack it so full of things. Most of them sleep on their own clothes; even after they mate it is common practice for an Omega to have a room that is exclusively for their nest, where they can retreat and rest if they need time to themselves.

Of course, Will won't have a need for a nest by the time Hannibal has mated him. Once Hannibal is through, he will have a killer in his bed, an Omega capable of staring into darkness and becoming one with it, with Hannibal at his side.

Seeing Will looking at him like that, hearing his voice say *Hannibal's* name with such open, shocked adoration, has filled him with energy. He does not forget Alana's slights, doesn't wipe away Jack's previous mistreatment of Will, but he instead slides them into little drawers in the desk of his mind, reminders of insults for later perusal and judgement.

He leaves his room once he has calmed down and takes his bag back upstairs, and places Will's outside of his room. He hesitates outside when he hears that Will is *purring*.

Alphas can purr on command, to soothe their mates or let an Omega know they have pleased their Alpha, and Omegas can force a purr to some extent, but by and large Omega purrs are almost entirely subconscious and difficult to fake.

They are also, Hannibal is discovering, an incredibly beautiful sound.

He has never heard a live Omega purr before. They have been recorded and studied in the medical field, but the crisp machinery of a recording device holds no chance of capturing it in its true nature. Hannibal's family had been entirely Alphas or women, as have been most of his patients, and since he has never gone out of his way to invoke feelings of extreme happiness or contentment in an Omega, he has never heard one purring so naturally up close. Certainly, never for *him*.

But Will is purring now, because of something he did. It warms Hannibal's chest like bonfire smoke and caramel and he closes his eyes, breathing in deeply.

He walks away before he gets caught listening.

"So, how exactly is this going to work?"

Hannibal looks up to see Will idly toying with his food, the tines of his fork flipping squares of beef – actually beef this time, since Hannibal hasn't had time to hunt for more of his favorite meat – over themselves on his plate and smearing the sesame seed oil around it.

Will's eyes are on the piece of meat. He has eaten, there's barely anything left on his plate, but Hannibal wonders if he's resisting these last few bites simply to give his hands something to

do. His restlessness is startling – he had been so calm for so long after his return from Minnesota.

It feels, for a split second, like a failure. One step forward, two steps back.

Hannibal straightens up and cups his glass of wine, taking a sip, before he sets it back down. "You are referring to your therapy?"

"Don't play coy," Will says, but there's no heat in his words. He's smiling. "I know the goal behind this kind of therapy, I understand what I'm going to have to do, but usually this kind of thing is done in groups. And neither you nor I have...average ways of thinking about the world."

"You're worried I might wind you up too tight and leave you spinning out of control?" Hannibal asks.

That coaxes another small smile out of Will. He finally spears the piece of meat with his fork and brings it to his lips. Hannibal watches him eat, only dropping his gaze when Will's eyes close and he gives a hum of appreciation. "I'm sorry I didn't get to stay last night," he says. "I've heard stories about your dinner parties. It's all anyone I spoke to talked about."

"A completely understandable, unfortunate turn of events," Hannibal says. "I shall have to take care to monitor your alcohol intake."

"I can hold my liquor just fine," Will says. "It's wine that gets me." Hannibal smiles and Will ducks his gaze, his cheeks turning a darker shade of pink to match the very wine that Hannibal so carefully set aside just for him. "I never did thank you, by the way. For...for what you did."

Hannibal isn't sure which part he's referring to. "I meant what I said before, Will. You are my friend, and I take your happiness very seriously."

Will smiles and stabs at the last bite of beef on his plate. "You think you can cure me, Doctor Lecter? Make me happy?" He asks it without bitterness – it is the open curiosity of a child, when they ask what love feels like or how the stars stay in the sky. But Hannibal feels the harsh steel beneath the velvet. There is a spiderweb behind Will's every word, each path of conversation leading to the inevitable black widow sitting in the center.

"You said it would take a very special Alpha to sate your needs," he says lightly, refilling his glass. Will hums in answer. "I believe you are correct."

Will regards him, sliding his fork from between his lips, pressed together. He swallows without chewing, and then averts his eyes and sets his knife and fork down and scratches at the side of his neck.

"You have spent a long, dark time in other people's heads, Will," Hannibal continues after a moment. "I intend to pull you back into your own. It will take time, and it will be difficult, but I am here to help you. That is the first thing I ask you to believe, and to trust. Trust me when I say that I am here to help you."

Will swallows again, loud enough that his throat clicks, his eyes on his plate. He licks his lips and nods, his fingers absently rubbing at the nape of his neck. It's a nervous gesture, an attempt at self-placation. It's never as good as the real thing.

"I trust you," Will whispers. It's almost as decadent a feeling as hearing Will say his name.

Hannibal smiles. He sets his knife and fork down and reaches out towards Will. He moves slowly, giving Will plenty of time to flinch away – and, indeed, his breath catches, the gold in his eyes flashing, but he doesn't shy back from Hannibal's touch. He allows Hannibal to gently slide his hand over Will's, the one with the bruised knuckles covering the one with the bandage, and he slowly forces Will's hand flat, threading through his hair. It's not as good as touching Will directly, but it's safer and easier for an Omega to allow. Will's eyelids flutter and he sighs, letting the pressure of Hannibal's hand slide against his skull.

Then Hannibal pulls back, lest he succumb to the desire to move far too quickly. They're in the stalking part of the hunt now – Hannibal has his sights on his prey, his scent in his nose and his trail guiding the way along the ground. Now he just has to wait for the perfect time to lunge.

Chapter 7

The last piece of a fully bonded Alpha-Omega pair, that cements their relationship and makes it so devastatingly unbreakable, is the access to the Alpha and Omega Voice.

Alphas possess in their vocal cords the ability to change their voice to encourage obedience. Omegas that hear it obey almost on command, whether that order is to drop to their knees, stop running, or, in more unfortunate circumstances, do harm to themselves. It is a change that is triggered much like puberty – when an Alpha bites their Omega and seals their bond and mates with them, it causes the structure of their voices to change and gives them access to the Alpha Voice. Omegas, in turn, release a hormone when bitten that causes their voices to gain a timbre compelling their Alpha to go almost feral with the need to nurture and provide for them.

Hannibal has, through his painstaking planning of this venture, acknowledged that Will might develop his Omega Voice after Hannibal has mated with him. He debated, for a while, performing surgery on Will to remove the growth in his windpipe that allows him to change his voice, but eventually decides against it. Once he is through with Will, he fully intends on their goals and mindsets to be the same. And Will would likely panic if he was robbed of that final, last-ditch survival ability after they mate.

As terribly oppressive and manipulative as it sounds, it is a true element of trust to mate with someone and allow their Voice to influence behavior. Hannibal has no intention of becoming a dictator to Will – that is not the point of this exercise. Merely, he wants Will to want to submit to him, to offer up his neck and his obedience when they are a mated pair, so that they can exist in perfect harmony.

It will also be important because, once Hannibal is mated to Will, his Voice will be the only one Will cannot resist. Since all mated Alphas have a Voice, it is imperative that Will reacts only to his, and Hannibal, in concert, will only react to Will's Voice.

It will be a delicate honeymoon period, he is sure, but not one he is unwilling to tackle and overcome. Will might fight him, might run from him, and that will only give Hannibal the opportunity to prove himself as the pinnacle of a mate and provider.

Still, he will have to tread carefully. This is the final stage of his plan, but also the one where anything that can go wrong, will go wrong. It is important that he remain vigilant and aware at all times.

Hannibal has coffee ready by the time Will exits his room at eleven in the morning. It is the longest that Will has slept, to Hannibal's knowledge, and the deep rest shows in his lax shoulders and his reddened cheeks as he pads down the stairs. He's wearing a soft, thin t-shirt and lounge pants that look old and comfortable, his feet bare.

It's the most vulnerable Hannibal has ever seen him. He's a fine feast of flesh to admire, his neck and the center of his collarbones bared, his hair soft and fluffy and sticking up all ways. Hannibal smiles at him when Will approaches the kitchen island and takes a seat at one of the bar stools there.

"You'll have to let me know how you like your coffee," he says, and slides a mug across the counter into Will's hands, as well as the French press and a bowl of creamers and sugar for Will to season it as he likes. Will takes it with a grateful hum, pouring himself a cup. "I have vanilla and caramel syrup as well, if you want it."

Will regards him with a raised eyebrow and takes a sip of the coffee, black. "Chemicals?" he asks.

Hannibal straightens up, humming. "I try to accommodate all of my guests, Will," he says. "I won't fault you for the sweet tooth nature has provided you."

Will hums again, taking another sip of coffee, his eyes on the sugar bowl. After a moment he sets the mug down and slides the sugar bowl across to him, spooning out two heaping dollops of sugar into the cup and stirring it.

"Did you ever fancy yourself a study of Omega nature, Doctor Lecter?" he asks.

Hannibal blinks. "Not with any particular mindset," he says, "but after a while it becomes necessary to understand the intricacies of different natures than my own. I was a surgeon, I had few patients on which to practice bedside manner, but there are diseases that are gender-specific I was expected to know how to treat."

"Purely anatomical, then."

"If you are suggesting I find Omega bodies more fascinating than those of Alphas, or women, I suppose you are right."

Will hums, taking a drink of his coffee. He smiles, and it's a relaxed and happy thing. Will smells *wonderful* over the scent of coffee, he hasn't used any more scent-deadening deodorants and there's no aftershave souring the smell of him. Without a shower he smells musky and warm, and is as soft and exposed as a kitten.

"How, then, have you found that extends to the study of the mind?" Will asks, and lifts his eyes. The gold in them is bright – clearly the implementation of a nest has done wonders for Will already, and Hannibal idly wonders why he went so long without.

He smiles and circles the counter, taking a seat next to Will. It is the only other chair available, and Will's eyes follow him without suspicion. It's the most open and calm Hannibal has ever seen him. He lacks the jitters and twitches of suppressant overdose, and there's no sharpness to his slight smile or tension in his shoulders.

"Omegas react differently to certain stimuli, that's been proven multiple times," he says, resting his forearms on the edge of the countertop. He has his sleeves rolled up to above his elbows, exposing his forearms, and Will's eyes fall to them. He swallows and turns his head

to take another sip of coffee, and the sight of his arching neck almost robs Hannibal of his next words. "They have not been studied as much as Alphas and women, however. I consider that a great misstep in the name of science."

"Well, we're hardly the dominant breed," Will murmurs into his mug. He tilts the cup back, straightening up to swallow more of his coffee, and then sets the empty mug down.

"You're outnumbered, yes," Hannibal concedes. The Alpha-Omega ratio in men is about seventy-thirty, the last time Hannibal checked. "But I have always held the belief that without Omegas, our species would have gone the way of the Neanderthal."

Will huffs a laugh, the corner of his mouth twitching upwards. "That's an interesting perspective," he says, "since most Alphas I've met are very much like them."

"A by-product of bad breeding," Hannibal says, nodding.

Will slants his eyes Hannibal's way, coy and assessing. Hannibal doesn't know what he sees. He fights the urge to put his hand in Will's hair. Perhaps he will have to invest in scent-deadening chemicals of his own, lest his pheromones betray him.

"I would like to speak openly to you, Will," he says.

Will hums. "And I, to you."

"I confess I'm curious why you allowed Jack to be your personal guardian. You didn't always work for him. Did you transfer ownership to him when you agreed to profile for him?"

Will huffs a laugh. "'Ownership'," he repeats, the word dark. But he nods. "My mother signed it to him when I moved to Virginia, to work for the FBI. And now he's given it to you."

"For the duration of your therapy, yes."

"And when it's done, you'll give it back?"

"If that is what you want," Hannibal replies. Will's eyes flash to him again and for the life of him, Hannibal cannot decide what he's thinking. "Until you mate, of course."

"Of course," Will murmurs, his eyes on Hannibal's face. Then, he swallows, and lowers his gaze to Hannibal's hands again. Hannibal looks down at his knuckles. They are in much better shape now; the bruising is almost completely gone and the backs of his hands are scabbed and soon those will disappear as well. "What if I wanted to remain in your care, Doctor Lecter?"

"You are an adult, Will, with your own mind and desires. I won't force you to submit to any Alpha you don't want to."

"Did you tell Jack that?" Will asks, an edge to his voice.

Hannibal smiles. "No." After all, if Jack had known his favorite toy was no longer going to be his, he wouldn't have agreed in the first place. Jack fully expects Will to come back to

him, even if Hannibal gets his teeth in Will's neck and his child in Will's belly.

Will huffs, turning back to his coffee mug. "I haven't slept as good as I did last night in a long time," he says. Hannibal blinks, following the trail of Will's thoughts until he finds himself on the same track. He smiles again.

"Nests have been proven to go a long way in soothing Omega temperament," he says.

"I like it out here," Will murmurs, and raises his eyes to stare out of the window-wall, where the trees are barren and the ground is littered with what remains of snow. It exposes the back of his neck, the delicate, most sensitive pressure points just hidden by his hair. Hannibal licks his lips and stares openly, until Will turns back to look at him. "How long have you owned this place?"

"Years," Hannibal replies. "I purchased it shortly after setting up my psychiatric practice."

"Have you ever taken anyone else here?"

"No." At least, no one still living.

Will makes a soft noise, like he's trying not to let his mirth show. Like he's trying not to purr. "I guess that makes me special, then," he says.

"There are a lot of things that make you special, Will," Hannibal replies. He's pleased to see Will's cheeks turn pink at the words, darkening from medium-rare to raw.

He hums. "So, this therapy," he starts, and Hannibal nods, following the next lily pad hop in Will's thoughts. "Did you have anything specific in mind?"

"What do you think it will entail?"

"I know the basics," Will murmurs, looking down at his hands. The bandage on his hand is fraying at the edges, it can likely be taken off now. His fingers curl and his nails drum against the countertop. "Touch placation, emotional conditioning. All big, scary words that sound more like torture if I'm perfectly honest."

"You find the idea of being placated...torturous?" Hannibal repeats. Will might be the first of his breed ever to do so.

Will huffs and rolls his eyes. "It's...intimate," he says, his eyes burning holes in the back of his bandaged hand. "It requires a lot of trust."

The fishing line is cast. Hannibal can see it flying through the air. His prey is getting smart, testing the edges of the bear trap covered in leaves. But Hannibal needs him to step into it. For that, he needs to bite at the lure.

"You trust me," he says, and Will can't deny it because he said as much last night. Will presses his lips together and nods. "If it would make you feel more comfortable, I have an exercise that was proposed recently in an Omega medical journal, for novices in the practice."

Will's eyes flash to him, the gold vibrant and gorgeous. It's bleeding into more of his iris – clearly, despite his hesitance, Will is incredibly intrigued by the idea. It occurs to Hannibal that Will, with his mental abilities, suffers from an extreme case of touch starvation. Anything Hannibal does to him will affect him more than the average Omega, even one traumatized enough to warrant this kind of therapy.

"What exercise?" he whispers, his voice hoarse with reined-in eagerness. He wants Hannibal to touch him. Hannibal can see it in his eyes, in the way Will's gaze is now fixed on Hannibal's hands.

Hannibal smiles, and stands. Will goes tense, lifting his gaze, and Hannibal turns and walks towards the coffee table in front of the fireplace, between it and the couch. He feels Will following him and turns to regard Will, smiling, and gestures for him to sit. Will does, his ankles tucked together, his palms pressed between his thighs, shoulders curled in.

Hannibal kneels down and slides out a drawer in the coffee table, that aligns perfectly with the edge so that, aside from the small divot where the handle is, it's almost unrecognizable. Inside it is a thin marble chessboard and pieces carved from white and black quartz.

Will lets out a soft, amused breath. "Chess?"

"I trust you know how to play?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods.

"The idea is simple," Hannibal says, as he takes the board out and places it on the table, setting up the pieces. He slides the drawer closed. "The game will engage your immediate thought process, and stop you from anticipating any placative touch. Instead, it is proposed that the Omega be rewarded with a touch whenever an opponent's piece is taken." He lifts his gaze briefly to assess Will's reaction. "It will, essentially, encourage you to want to win."

Will swallows, his eyes on the board. "And what if you take a piece?" he asks.

"Then you must tell me something. It can be a favored childhood memory, your favorite color, but something personal that will help you foster a sense of comfort and familiarity with me."

Will's eyes lift and meet Hannibal's. "Sounds very one-sided," he says.

Hannibal smiles, and pushes himself up to sit on the couch opposite Will. "No more one-sided than a normal psychiatric session, Will," he says. Will bites his lip and looks down again. "Despite the surroundings, despite the circumstances, I encourage you to think of this as simply another of our friendly conversations. No one here is going to harm you."

"And what happens when the game ends?"

"The exercise ends."

Will swallows again, shifts his weight, and slides closer on the couch so that he's perched on the edge of it. "White goes first?" he asks, and reaches out to idly brush his fingertips along

the edge of the board, just shy of the white Queen.

Hannibal smiles, and nods.

Will sighs, considering the board, his eyes darting one way, then the other. Then, he takes the pawn in front of the King and slides it two places forward. Hannibal responds with moving his Queen-side knight over the line of pawns.

Will smiles, lopsided and amused, and raises his eyes. "Didn't take you for a defensive player, Hannibal," he says, and Hannibal has to pause for a moment, wholly affected by the sound of his name coming from Will's mouth. He says it affectionately, intimately.

Hannibal merely shrugs and leans forward, his elbows on his knees. The space between them is small and Will meets his gaze for a long moment, before he looks down at the board. He slides the pawn in front of his King-side rook forward two places.

"Here is where one of the differences in mindset take place," Hannibal says idly, pushing his Queen-front pawn forward one space. Will makes a soft sound of question. "You are eager to attack early, expose your most powerful players in the hopes of gaining the early advantage."

"And you hide them, and let the grunts do the dirty work," Will replies, smiling.

"Many a war has been won around the actions of a small, weak group," Hannibal says as Will takes his Bishop and runs it across the board until it's diagonally in line to attack Hannibal's knight. He doesn't take the piece, though he can, and it sits next to his pawn. "One Omega can bring down an Empire, for instance."

Will hums, and Hannibal drops his gaze to the board. He moves his Bishop in line to attack Will's Queen.

Will reacts quickly, pulling his Queen out and taking the Bishop. Hannibal smiles and lifts his gaze. The way they're seated, touching Will would be impractical, so he stands and moves to the side of the board and sits on the couch there, at a right-angle from Will.

Will's breath catches. His eyes are alight with anticipation – wanting the reward, as Hannibal knew he would. He smiles and, slowly, reaches out. It gives Will time to move away, allows him the opportunity to fight his instinctive desire to be touched, to resist the intimacy and change his mind.

Will doesn't move, and Hannibal slides his hand into place on Will's shoulder. There is a sensitive spot within the dip of skin above his collarbone and, exposed as it is by his t-shirt, it's practically begging for the pressure of Hannibal's thumb.

He rubs his thumb along the hard edge of Will's collarbone, spreading his hand out along the back of Will's shoulder, and stops just before he touches his neck. Will lets out a shaky exhale, blinking slowly, his lips parting as he breathes deep. He ducks his head and puts his eyes on the board, heavy-lidded. His fingers tremble and close into a tight fist.

Hannibal lets the touch linger a moment longer, before he withdraws. His palm feels hot and there's a flush on Will's skin now. He swallows and clears his throat. "Your turn, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs. Trying to maintain the distance. Hannibal allows it.

He takes Will's Queen with his pawn. Will lets out a breath, smiling shakily.

"My mom makes the best pineapple upside-down cake South of the Mason-Dixon line," he says. Hannibal smiles. It's an indulgent treat, rich with sugar and terrible for the body, but he understands Will's fondness for it. "She'd always make it for me and my father on Sundays."

Hannibal doesn't reply. Will moves another pawn, and Hannibal moves one of his. The next time a piece is taken, it's one of Will's rooks.

Will sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. His fingers aren't shaking anymore but his scent is turning sweeter, reacting to sitting so close to an Alpha. Clearly even one touch has cost him the ability to strategize. "I've always had dogs," he says. "First one was a glorified carpet. He'd just lay at the end of my bed and do nothing all day."

"Dogs have been the only pack you've allowed yourself for a long time," Hannibal says, and Will nods, his eyes meeting Hannibal's for a brief moment. "Have you ever considered making more personal connections before now?"

"No," Will confesses, shaking his head. "I haven't had the luxury."

"Because of your empathy?"

"Because of everyone else's lack of it," Will replies. His upper lip curls back in a brief show of disgust. "I never considered it a weakness."

"Do you consider it a weakness now?"

"No," Will says. He takes one of Hannibal's knights in the next move, and his shoulders roll in anticipation. Hannibal smiles and slides further on the edge of his seat.

This time, when he touches Will, he brushes his fingers across his forehead. He's warm to the touch, his skin damp with a tease of sweat. His eyelids flutter and he leans into it, seeking more pressure when Hannibal's palm goes flat and his fingers thread through Will's hair. His hair is starting to turn greasy. Hannibal will mourn the loss of his scent when Will showers.

They keep playing. Hannibal learns that Will threw his first punch when he was a teenager and some Alpha had gotten too handsy with him. He imagines slitting the Alpha's throat and licking Will clean when Will tells him the story of the first time he broke a bone – wrestling with his dog and falling down the stairs. He finds out Will's favorite color – red, and what a beautiful moment that is – and his favorite type of candy, and Will tells him that the last time he dreamed of the Ripper, aside from his dream about Alana, the Ripper was singing to him.

Will loses when Hannibal corners his King with a Queen and his remaining Bishop. Will's eyes are black, the only part left of his iris showing is shining with gold. He's shaking and breathing hard, his fists clenched tight in the couch cushions on either side of his thighs.

Hannibal can smell that he's aroused – it's a natural response to being placated, and most Omegas react to an Alpha's touch on sensitive areas with the slick mechanism. His pheromones are delightfully sweet and rich, German chocolate and cinnamon, mint and lemongrass through it all. Hannibal's hand feels like it's on fire when he rewards Will one last time, and slides his hand across the back of Will's shoulders, just shy of his nape.

Will's back arches. He wants Hannibal to touch the back of his neck, but to do that would mean coming out of the water too soon, and it is still far too early to take anything farther with Will. His loyalty is still an open discussion and he is by far not even close to being bonded to Hannibal enough to risk anything else.

Hannibal takes his hand away and Will whimpers, biting his lip to try and stifle the noise. His eyes are hazy, glazed with pleasure and calm, and he looks as beautiful as any of the paintings in any art gallery Hannibal has ever seen.

"You play well," Hannibal murmurs, gathering the pieces up and sliding the drawer out to put them away.

Will hums, licks his lips, gasps again. He's scenting the air, dragging it across the roof of his mouth, and his cheeks darken. He can smell himself, and knows Hannibal smells it too.

"Not...as well as you," he murmurs. He sounds drunk.

Hannibal smiles. "You'll get better with practice," he says. Will nods slowly, like he's listening to something from far away and agreeing blankly with it. "Why don't you shower and get some rest. I'll wake you when lunch is ready."

"Okay," Will says, and stands. His lounge pants cling to the backs of his thighs and his hands are trembling. He walks slowly to the stairs and braces himself against the bannister, taking in another deep breath. "Hannibal -."

Hannibal looks up.

Will swallows harshly, his eyes fixed somewhere on the floor between the two of them. He licks his lips again, wetting his dry mouth, and frowns. "Why have you never mated?" he asks.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, before he looks down at the board and pretends to consider the question. "I suppose...I never found an Omega who I thought could sate my needs."

He doesn't look up to see the words land. He knows how Will is going to hear them. He hides his smile and waits until Will goes upstairs and he hears the door to the guest bathroom close, and the water starts running.

He stands and goes to his bathroom. Inside is a bottle of aspirin, which he brings to Will's room. The pile of blankets and pillows has been turned into a haphazard nest – not yet fully formed, but the stencil is there. An apt metaphor.

He opens Will's bag and takes out his suppressant medication, and his aspirin. The pills look very similar, which he knew would be the case. He pours out the suppressant medication bottle and replaces it with aspirin, and puts Will's suppressant medication back into his aspirin bottle. He puts the suppressant bottle back and replaces the aspirin with the one from his medicine cabinet in his own room.

Then, he takes Will's suppressant medication and pours them down the garbage disposal in the kitchen, and throws the empty bottle away.

Chapter 8

Hannibal wakes to his cell phone ringing at near four in the morning. He does not know the number, and he sits up, frowning down at his phone for a moment, before he answers it.

"Yes?"

"Is this Doctor Lecter?"

"Speaking," Hannibal says. He frowns at the door to his bedroom. It is standing slightly open, a peeping-Tom width revealing darkness beyond. He is certain that he closed the door all the way when he retired that night. Will had been asleep, the exhaustion from Hannibal placating him burning out his fuses and rendering him less than reactive for the rest of the day, no matter how long he rested. Hannibal had managed to get him to eat, and he had bathed well enough, but other than that most of their interactions had been entirely one-sided.

All Will could manage was the occasional hum.

"Sir, I found your Omega in the middle of the road, a few miles shy of the highway. He's safe, I have him secured in our squad car, but he can't tell me where you are. I think he might have been sleepwalking."

Hannibal gets to his feet hurriedly, and goes to his wardrobe to get his robe and slippers. "I own a cabin in the area," he explains to the man he assumes is a police officer. The fact that Will was intercepted before he reached any busier roads is fortunate, but Hannibal bristles at the idea of some other Alpha being so close to his land unchecked. "I'm on my way."

"I can bring him to you, if you'd like," the man says.

Hannibal resists the urge to snarl. Allow Will, one small touch away from tripping into a chemically-heightened heat, to be left unattended in a car with an Alpha? Hannibal cannot allow that. "That's not necessary," he says, descending the stairs and grabbing his car keys from the side table. The kitchen light is on, the door to the fridge hanging open. He walks in and closes it. "May I speak to him?"

"Of course," the man says, and Hannibal hears him walking, a rustling coming over the phone that means he has his phone hanging at his side. Hannibal climbs into his car and turns it on just as he hears Will take the phone.

For a moment, there's silence, and then, almost as quiet as a body slipping below the surface of a lake; "Hannibal?"

Hannibal takes a moment to realize the emotion he's feeling is relief, and he smiles as he puts the phone to his other ear, shifts the car into reverse, and backs out of the driveway. There's only one road leading to the cabin and it is several miles long, and Hannibal is sure he will be able to find the police car that has Will.

"Hello, Will," he replies, and hears Will suck in a shivery breath. He sounds lucid enough, but slow, like every thought is taking twice as long to form and leave his mouth. It's a symptom of pre-heat stupor and Hannibal hates that Will is alone with a strange Alpha in such a vulnerable state.

Will lets out a soft whine, calling Hannibal's attention back to him. "I'm on my way," he says, trying to keep his voice as soothing as he can. He can't allow Will to pick up on the fact that Hannibal feels almost *frantic*. He can't see any flashing blue or red lights, not yet, and he's hesitant to drive any faster than he is lest he hit an animal and be delayed. "Are you alright?"

"I'm...sorry," Will says, his voice catching. Hannibal imagines his mouth twitching at the corner the way it does when he's fighting the urge to bare his teeth. He knows without looking that Will is trying to show his neck, beg forgiveness of the Alpha who isn't even there to be angry with him. He whines again, one of those soft ones Omegas can make to ingratiate themselves to their mates.

Even though Hannibal knows it's just a side effect of his hormones, the fact that Will is verbally reacting to Hannibal as though they're mated is incredibly promising and endearing, and Hannibal breathes a soft sigh when he turns a corner and sees the squad car and an Alpha standing in police gear, his arms folded and leaning against the gas cap of the car. The back driver-side door is open and Hannibal can see Will sitting in the car, bent over his knees, a blanket around his shoulders to shield his neck, arms, and bare thighs from sight.

"I'm here," he murmurs, and hangs up when Will lifts his head. Hannibal pulls up alongside the squad car and parks it, leaving the engine running so that it will be warm for Will. He gets out of the car and approaches the police officer.

"Doctor Lecter?" the man asks. His nametag on his uniform tells Hannibal that his last name is 'Chesterton'. Hannibal nods and offers his hand to shake, and Chesterton takes it and shakes it once. He has a small ring of red around his iris, the rest of his eye almost black in the low light. He's a young man, there's a wedding ring on his finger, and he smells of coffee and Vienna sausages. "Sorry to call you out so late. I would have brought him to you but, as you can see..."

He bites his lip and falls silent. Hannibal understands why – it would be rude of him, and perhaps pose as a threat, to outright mention how potent and *wonderful* Will smells. His scent is thick and sharp, mint and lemon and none of that awful rutting scent that Hannibal has smelled on him before. Instead, he's Earthy and clean and the scent of him to Hannibal's nose gives him the same feeling of joy and satisfaction as watching the light drip out of someone's eyes to the rhythm of their slowing heartbeat. Will smells good enough to eat.

Will looks up, his eyes glazed and wholly golden. He presses his lips together, clears his throat, and grabs the upper edge of the door and hauls himself to his feet. They're bare, and he's only wearing a t-shirt and underwear. Hannibal wants to fall to his knees and suck dark bruises onto Will's thighs. He wants to rake his nails across Will's bared throat until he's a patchwork quilt of cross-hairs, targets for Hannibal's mouth to claim later.

Will hands his phone back to Chesterton. "Thank you," he murmurs, and he sounds drunk. Hannibal takes a step forward and Will practically falls into him. Hannibal's hands flatten on

Will's side, on his arm, and Will wraps his hands in his blanket and pulls it tight with a shiver. Hannibal can feel Will's sweaty forehead against his jaw, smells the open air and Will's shampoo in his wet hair, and he's so incredibly warm and soft in Hannibal's hold, as trusting as a newborn with their mother.

"You all good here?" Chesterton asks, and Hannibal can see him scenting the air. It's procedure – if an Omega is left wandering, technically any Alpha can show up and claim them, and it's important that the officer scent the couple to make sure the Omega is comfortable leaving with the Alpha who collects them – but still Hannibal wants to snarl defensively and rip the Alpha's face apart for daring to scent Will.

But he nods and offers a cordial smile. He rubs a hand through Will's hair and cups the back of his head and Will sags against him with a plaintive whine. "Yes, thank you," he says. "I shall return him to his nest immediately."

Chesterton nods and stays only long enough for Hannibal to get Will into his car and shut the door. He turns his lights off and Hannibal does a U-turn and starts the drive back up to the cabin.

Will is trembling, his skin shining with sweat and his scent thick with something like distress. "I don't - I'm sorry," he whispers, and he's rubbing at his neck with his fingertips hard enough to raise red lines, and up across his jaw like his teeth are aching.

"Do you remember leaving the cabin, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods after a moment. "I was hot," he says.

Understandable. Heats did not get their name from someone who appreciated irony. Right now Will's body is trying to become as fertile and welcoming a vessel for an Alpha's child as possible, and as such his internal body temperature will be raised, creating a fever-like condition. He will also start to crave foods like meat and fresh fruit, to sweeten his blood and entice an Alpha to want to bite and mate with him.

These are all things Hannibal understands in rational, anatomical ways. But understanding their purpose does not make them any less effective.

And Will's behavior is certainly not helping. He's squirming in his seat, his breathing unsteady and heavy, and he keeps touching his neck like he's trying to mimic the sting of an Alpha biting him, trying to self-placate enough to calm himself down.

"I imagine you'll have less than two days before it hits you fully," Hannibal murmurs as the lights of the cabin come into view. He slows the car to a stop in the driveway and kills the engine. It starts to get cold immediately and Will breathes a sigh of relief.

"I thought that – 'cause I was still on them, that I'd -." He sucks in a sharp breath, his eyes glazed over. There's no blue or green left to his iris and the gold in them is beautiful. Hannibal wants to spend hours admiring the swirl of it, the way they glow above Will's pink cheeks and full, parted mouth.

Will turns to look at him and Hannibal blinks, forcing himself to focus. "Can that happen?" he asks, and he sounds so young and afraid. He reaches out and touches Hannibal's hand lightly. "Could I have taken so many that even stopping a *little* did this?"

Hannibal cocks his head to one side and pretends to consider it. "Perhaps," he says. "It's still a drug, Will, still unnatural for your body. Addicts still get withdrawal symptoms, even when weaned off their poison of choice."

Will huffs a strangled-sounding laugh. His hand hasn't moved. "Withdrawal," he repeats, and then he turns away and sits in his chair as though he intends to sink through it. He puts both hands in his hair and clenches them tightly, and his white knuckles stand out starkly amongst the sweat-dark curls. "No, I can't go into heat. I can't."

"You're afraid of losing control," Hannibal says.

Will swallows, his eyes darting to Hannibal's face, then away. "Yes," he whispers. Hannibal knows he wants to say more. He's afraid of *Hannibal* losing control. Hannibal's prey has just become aware that he's being hunted, and he's starting to panic. But he can't tell Hannibal that he's afraid of *him*, because he risks angering the Alpha into whose hands he has put his trust and livelihood.

Even though Will is strong, and intelligent, and no more a dainty wisp of a thing than Hannibal is, he's still an Omega, which means Hannibal can hurt him. Easily. Even now, all Hannibal would have to do is reach over and pinch the nape of Will's neck just right and Will would be unable to stop Hannibal doing whatever he wanted. Without his Voice, he has no way to fight back if Hannibal should decide to harm him.

It's a delicate point in Hannibal's plan, but he has prepared for it.

"I have Neutral shots in my medical bag," he says. Will's eyes snap to him, wide, a flicker of relief and suspicion crossing his face all at once. "If you're truly not ready, and you are afraid, I have enough to stall your heat for a few days. Then, your suppressants may take effect again, and this will be a small blip on the radar to your recovery."

Will stares at him. Hannibal meets his gaze, surprised after a moment when Will doesn't blink, doesn't look away. He's not challenging Hannibal, but looks at him like Hannibal is a piece of art he's just uncovered from behind a wall and all he can do is take in every detail.

Then, Will swallows, and another small tremor runs through his body. "Please," he whispers, and ducks his gaze and shows his neck. For good measure – though he hardly needs to – Hannibal hears him let out a small Omega whine, begging his Alpha to have mercy on him.

Hannibal smiles and gets out of the car and heads inside. Will follows after a moment in an unsteady shuffle, zombie-like as he follows Hannibal to the kitchen.

"Sit," Hannibal says, nodding to the bar stool, and Will practically collapses onto it with a sigh. He presses his forehead to the countertop and closes his eyes, moaning in relief. Hannibal goes to his room and grabs his medical bag and opens it. He takes one of the Neutral shots he brought with him and comes down the stairs.

Will has his arms up around his head, resting on the counter. He looks like he could be asleep, but when Hannibal enters the room, he lifts his head and lets out a soft purr. Hannibal pauses, his head cocked to one side. Will doesn't make another sound, but his eyes are on the shot in Hannibal's hands, ravenous.

Hannibal uncaps the shot and approaches Will. He pets through Will's hair and Will smiles up at him, unsteady, thankful beyond words, desperate. Hannibal returns it, sliding his palm along Will's cheek, cupping his jaw, and then he wraps his fingers back through Will's hair and forces his head down.

Hannibal might be doing Will a mercy, here, but he will not do it for free.

Will moans softly, enraptured, too drunk off heat hormones to care about defending himself and so relieved and grateful to Hannibal for offering him this way out that baring his neck is a small pittance to pay. Hannibal puts his gaze on Will's nape, marks the flush of red between his hairline and the collar of his shirt.

Will starts to purr again and Hannibal can't help himself. He takes his hand from Will's hair and wraps it around the front of his neck so he can feel the vibration against his hand. Will puts all his weight against Hannibal's hand, his eyes closed, his mouth open so that his breathing is loud in the room.

Hannibal has to set the shot down. His fingers are trembling too much to hold it safely.

He puts his other hand on Will's neck, slides his palms back to cup both sides of Will's neck in a tease of a chokehold. Will's heartbeat is pounding under his hands but Will himself is still. Despite the pre-heat hormones that Hannibal can *taste* in the air, despite the fact that he's cold and feverish all at once, he is completely without jitters and twitches. It's the calmest Hannibal has ever seen him. Placated.

Hannibal steps up so that Will's back is pressed against his stomach and he puts his thumbs along the tendons on the back of Will's neck, where the most sensitive pressure points are hidden. Will swallows and Hannibal feels it under his fingertips.

He presses down and Will sighs, tilts his head up, and lets Hannibal cup his throat with one hand. The back of his head touches Hannibal's chest and he opens his eyes and stares upwards, lips parted, begging to be touched and ravished and as marked as Hannibal can make him.

He takes the shot in his other hand, angles it so the needle touches Will's bare arm, and sinks it inside. Will heaves in a breath, his eyes closing, and he presses his lips together and swallows as the Neutral drug takes effect.

It worked quickly on Will last time, and with his heart hammering so quickly Hannibal is sure it will run its course within minutes. He lets Will's neck go, steps away, and caps the needle and throws it into the garbage can.

When he looks back up, Will has his forearms braced on the counter. There's a silhouette of sweat on the surface where his forehead was, and he's staring at the countertop like it will tell

him the meaning of life. His scent is getting duller, and with every passing second Hannibal can see motion return to Will's body. His fingers start to flex and curl around each other, his shoulders roll. He bites his lower lip and jogs his leg on the rung of the bar stool.

Hannibal sighs through his nose and leans on the counter from the other side, a safe distance away from Will so as not to trigger his flight reflex. "Will," he says, and Will lifts his eyes, flinches, and looks back down. "Why didn't you wake me?"

Will swallows, bares the edges of his teeth, grits them, works his jaw from side to side. His eyes are laser-sharp on his fidgeting fingers. "I was afraid," he replies, barely louder than a sigh.

Hannibal waits, but Will doesn't offer any more information. He clasps his hands together and ducks his head to try and catch Will's eyes again, but Will avoids him like they're magnets of the same alignment trying to meet.

"What were you afraid of?" Hannibal asks.

Will swallows, drums his nails against the countertop. "Of what I'd do."

It's an answer Hannibal expected. Except not quite. "Of what *you'd* do?" he parrots back, blinking in shock. He expected Will to be afraid of an Alpha's reaction to him being so close to heat and crawling into his bed, not of himself.

Will bites his lower lip and nods. "Will," Hannibal begins, "the point of this therapy is that you *don't* deny your instincts, or fight them, or resist them with chemicals or mental exercises or anything else. An Omega is the purest form of our species, and the survival instincts in them are essential. Denying them...you might as well be overdosing on your suppressants."

"You're so *arrogant*," Will growls, his eyes lifting and meeting Hannibal's gaze in a challenge. His anger is cutting, startling – beautiful. It makes his eyes flash and they're less gold now, back to the icy gunpowder-blue that Hannibal knows so well, and the bared edges of his teeth in his mouth and the outraged color of anger in his cheeks is wonderful to behold. "It's all well and good to say that I've *poisoned* my body, that I'm an addict, that I need *help*. Alphas don't need help, do they? They're just...fuckin' *perfect*." He spits the word. "No behavioral therapy for them. They're *gifted* or *brilliant* or *special*."

Hannibal smiles. "You resent your biology, or how society judges you because of it?"

"I don't care what society thinks, I care what *you* think!"

Abruptly, Will goes silent. He swallows back his words hard enough to sound like he's choking. Hannibal straightens up as Will's shoulders sag. He's lost one of their verbal bouts, and he knows it. He's revealed a weakness and Hannibal could so easily slide the knife between his ribs and leave him to bleed out.

He straightens up and circles the counter. Will has his eyes downcast, and he's biting his lower lip and rubbing the edge of the countertop like he's trying to carve a hole for himself to crawl through.

Hannibal comes to a stop when he's at Will's flank. "Will," he murmurs, and Will goes still, shoulders tensed up. "Will, please look at me."

Will tilts his head, manages a split-second of eye contact, and then settles for staring at the monogrammed initials on Hannibal's robe. It's good enough, and Hannibal is feeling merciful.

So instead he puts a gentle hand on Will's shoulder and squeezes. Will shivers. "In the future, I ask that you do come and wake me, should the urge to wander strike you again." Will bites his lower lip and nods. "And the next time you feel yourself at war with what your instincts are telling you, perhaps you should examine if *you* are the one fighting them, or if it is that persona you broadcast to the outside world that is keeping you from embracing your true nature."

Will blinks, frowning, and Hannibal pulls his hand away. As soon as he does, he hears Will give a soft whine, and he stops and turns to regard him again.

Will blushes, swallowing harshly. His lips part, he trips over the beginning of 'Sorry', but then he swallows it back. Because he isn't sorry. Omega whines are as natural as purrs, and can happen without conscious choice.

"Would you like me to try placating you before you return to your nest?" Hannibal asks.

Will shakes his head, his blush darkening. "I don't think I have it in me to play chess right now," he replies, and Hannibal allows him to stand and doesn't comment because he knows Will knows he didn't intend to masquerade it as a game of chess. He wonders if Will even considered that the study Hannibal cited might be made up. If he would care.

"I'll see you in the morning, Will," Hannibal says, smiling when Will gives him a shaky nod, curling his blanket tightly around his shoulders. It's long enough to touch the backs of his knees and Hannibal watches as he climbs the stairs and flees into his room, the door shutting quickly behind him.

Hannibal sighs through his nose and returns to his room, putting his robe and slippers back in place. Then, he goes to his medical bag. He has five Neutral shots remaining, and if Will remains off his suppressants, he will likely need one every twelve hours, and that is assuming his metabolism is that of the average Omega and his suppressant withdrawal won't do anything to speed up his body's desire to be impregnated.

So by the most liberal of estimates, Hannibal has just over two days. Which isn't a lot of time, and certainly not as much as he planned for. But Will has proven responsive to his manipulation and his care, and if Hannibal has to compress his schedule, he shall simply increase the intensity to compensate.

He smiles and places the bag at the bottom of his closet, closing the door. He closes his bedroom door as well and returns to bed.

After a moment, he gets back up and leaves his door slightly cracked. Perhaps, if Will decides that he would rather listen to his instincts next time, it will provide an encouragement

for him to come to Hannibal.

It will also mean that Hannibal will be able to see any light and hear any movement outside of the door. Will cannot escape him a second time.

Chapter 9

Hannibal rises early the next morning, strangely full of vigor. The scent of Will's pre-heat sweetness is thick in his home as he leaves his bed, gets dressed, and heads down to the kitchen. The kitchen in particular reeks of Will, and Hannibal takes in as deep a breath as he can, savoring the way Will's scent sits on his tongue, clogs up the back of his throat like thick pudding.

He busies himself with brewing coffee, knowing the smell will rouse Will. It is to be expected that Will is going to suffer an overabundance of exhaustion. After being placated and with his body swinging wildly between rutting, overdosing on suppressants, heat and then the denial of that heat, Hannibal wouldn't be surprised if his mind simply chose to shut down and force himself to rest so that he can, in essence, get all its needs in order.

Will is at a delicate stage, and it is at this time that Hannibal must attempt bonding with him in earnest. If Will does not accept him, doesn't want to bare his neck and spread his legs for Hannibal when his heat hits, Hannibal of course will not force him to. He's not that kind of monster. But he runs the risk of overplaying his hand and the only result that he can reasonably accept is Will's total surrender to him. Once they're bonded, Will has to accept Hannibal as his Alpha, and will be more susceptible to Hannibal's inclinations and desires. Once they're bonded, Hannibal will own Will's body and his heart, and all that will be left is his mind.

Hannibal sets out the caramel and vanilla syrup, and a mug and saucer for Will, with the sugar bowl, creamers, and a spoon. With Will so close to his heat, he will almost certainly crave anything and everything sweet, beyond the two spoonful's he indulged in the morning before.

Then, he starts breakfast. He has gammon steaks, a pineapple, eggs, and spinach leaves. A high-protein breakfast is the best thing for Will during his pre-heat stage, until it really kicks in and his body will demand carbohydrates to keep his energy up enough to breed. The breakfast is lower-brow than he's used to, and the scents of grease do an unfortunately good job of ridding the kitchen of Will's scent, but Hannibal reminds himself that he is doing this for Will's benefit, and is sure he will be appreciated.

He has the pineapple sliced and is cutting out the centers when Will appears in the doorway to the kitchen. He looks...like a mess, quite frankly. But a truly delicious one. His hair is wild, he's been tossing and turning all night, it seems, his face red from warmth and his eyes glowing a dull, molten gold. His mouth looks sore like he's been touching and biting his lips all night, and Hannibal can see a dark collar of sweat around his neck on his t-shirt, before it disappears under his soft-looking, grey robe.

"Good morning, Will," he greets, and Will flinches like the sound of Hannibal's voice startles him. He swallows and pulls his robe tighter around himself, tying the belt at his waist. "I have coffee, and breakfast is almost ready. Please, sit."

Will nods, and moves on auto-pilot to the bar stools. He hesitates and then takes a seat on the one he did *not* sit on the night before. His nostrils are flared, he's doing whatever he can to avoid breathing through his mouth. Alphas and Omegas have a good sense of smell, but the glands on the roof of their mouths are particularly sensitive to things like heat and rutting scent. Hannibal wonders if it's the heat scent that offends him, or he's trying not to smell Hannibal.

Hannibal smiles at him, and gathers the cores of the pineapple in his hand, throwing them away. Will watches his hands for a long moment, before he clears his throat and runs his fingers over his jaw, scratching at the shadow of hair on his face.

Hannibal washes his hands and takes the French press, placing it in front of Will without a word. Will gives him a shaky ghost of a smile, and takes it. His fingers tremble and hold the handle too tight as he pours himself a cup of coffee, leaves it half-full, and fills the rest of the cup with vanilla syrup until it's almost to the brim.

He cradles the mug in his hands and bends his head to take a drink, and sighs. "Thank you," he murmurs, and he sounds exhausted and meek, as vulnerable as sweet as a fawn, trembling and wide-eyed between its mother's legs. Hannibal lays out the pineapple rings on the frying pan and turns the heat down low.

"Did you sleep any better?" Hannibal asks, looking over his shoulder so that he can gauge Will's reaction.

Will makes a bitter, aggravated noise, and shakes his head, glaring down at the coffee mug. He takes another large mouthful and tops it up with caramel syrup this time, and sugar from the bowl. It's like he understands the sweet tooth as well, but reacts to it with the same battle calm of a man who sees an army of soldiers on the horizon and knows there's no place to run and no time to hide.

"No," he replies, softly. His fingers are less shaky now, his low blood sugar calmed by the copious amounts of syrup in his coffee. Hannibal turns away and hides his smile – the syrup is special, in the same way Will's wine is special. It will exacerbate his heat symptoms, and some part of his body will recognize the hormonal influence of an Alpha in his food and drink.

"That is unfortunate," Hannibal says. He takes out two plates and slides the gammon steaks onto them, one on each, with a pineapple ring on top of the meat and two eggs with the spinach leaves on the sides. He carries the plates to the kitchen island and sets one in front of Will, with a knife and fork next to it. Will stares at the food for a moment, like he's taken aback by the sight of it, and then he picks up his utensils and starts to eat. "If you'd like, I can give you something to help you sleep."

Will shakes his head, one cheek bulging with a mix of egg and gammon. He's eating like he's starving. His metabolism is eager to burn up all the excess poison in his system and throw itself into a full heat. He swallows one bite half-chewed and immediately takes another.

After a few minutes, his hunger has calmed enough for him to actually chew his food, and he swallows and ducks his gaze. His lashes are dark with the gold inside them, highlighted

against his iris and the pretty flush on his cheeks.

"I can't afford to pass out like that," Will says, and wipes the back of his wrist across his mouth before he starts eating again. His lack of table manners would be appalling, if it didn't point to symptoms of his approaching heat. "I gotta be able to wake up."

"Do you think you're in danger, here?"

Will lifts his eyes and regards Hannibal for a moment. Then, he sighs through his nose, and sets his knife and fork down. He takes a long, loud drink of coffee and sets the mug down as well, his eyes on Hannibal's hands.

He heaves another breath like he's gearing up for an argument. "You want us to be open with each other," he says. "To speak plainly."

"Yes," Hannibal says. "Not just as patient and doctor, but as friends."

At that, Will manages a small smile. It seems genuine enough, and lacks the bitter edge with which Will usually responds to Hannibal's declarations of friendship. "That complicates things, then," he says. Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "There are things I tell you I wouldn't tell my friends, and vice versa. And -." He holds a hand up, staying Hannibal's reply. "I know you. And I know Jack. I could ask you something and hear Jack's words come out in your voice. God knows I've heard it the other way around."

He pauses, takes a drink of his coffee again, and swallows harshly before he looks down at his plate.

"Tell me, Doctor Lecter," he says, and raises his eyes again to somewhere around Hannibal's chin. "What do you think Jack told me when I asked him what he thought of this...whole thing?"

Hannibal straightens up, folding his arms across his chest, and leans back against the kitchen counter. His own plate sits on the island across from Will, untouched, and Will doesn't lower his gaze. He's trying to stay in the conversation, but his fingers are shaking again.

As he waits for Hannibal's answer, he goes back to eating, until his plate is clean.

"A broad scenario," Hannibal finally says, and Will huffs a small laugh. "But I imagine you're referring to you asking him why *I* volunteered to do this in an isolated environment. Why I didn't sign you into a facility program or some such thing."

"Sure," Will says. "More or less."

"Well, if the question is what I think Jack said in reply, I'd say he said something to the effect of that our prior relationship gives me an insight into your mind, which other doctors wouldn't have. He would have said something that sounded genuinely for your own good, like you were special and deserved to be treated as such, but really what it means is that, as you said, Jack doesn't want to break his favorite toy."

Will smiles and pours himself a second cup of coffee, half actually coffee and the rest syrup like it was before. Hannibal waits for him to take a drink. "Was I right?"

"To a 'T'," Will replies, licking his lips to get the rest of the sugar still clinging there. His smile widens, lopsided and sharp again. "He said you'd know how to 'handle' me. That I'd be safest with you." He hums and puts an elbow on the countertop and runs a hand over the back of his neck. "I think he really meant to say that...I'd be safest, but so would everyone else."

"You truly believe that you are dangerous," Hannibal murmurs. Will goes still and presses his lips together. "How deeply have these killers that Jack makes you see infected your mind?"

"You asked me if I thought about killing people once," Will replies, shaking his head. "I dream about it, too. I see myself doing it. And I wake up and – and you know what the worst part of it is?" He looks up and Hannibal meets his gaze. "I don't feel...sick, or disgusted. Or even afraid."

Hannibal waits for him to say more, but it's like the words get caught in Will's throat. He sucks in a ragged breath through his parted jaws and lowers his head and Hannibal straightens, and bends to rest his forearms against the kitchen island. This close he could reach out and touch Will if he wanted to.

"How do you feel when you wake up, Will?" he asks.

Will swallows, sucks in a breath through his teeth, grits them. His fingers curl and lace together and he scratches the inside of his wrist.

"I feel lonely," he confesses, and this time when he looks up he meets Hannibal's gaze and holds it. The golden ring in his eyes is thick, coloring almost his entire iris. "I feel like I've just done this amazing thing and I wake up and look around for someone to share it with, and there's no one there."

Hannibal presses his lips together, sighing through his nose. His hands are clasped and he slides his hands outward, catching Will's and smoothing his fingertips along the red lines Will's nails have left behind on his wrists.

"Even if it's only in conversation," he says, and makes sure Will is meeting his eyes, "you can share with me."

Will bites his lower lip, his cheeks turning pink, and he looks down at what remains of the food on his plate. He pulls his fingers back and Hannibal lets him, and takes his own plate, circling the kitchen island and sitting down next to Will as he starts to eat.

"I appreciate the choice of diet," Will murmurs after a moment of companionable silence.

Hannibal smiles. "It is my duty to accommodate all of your body's demands," he says. Then, crisply; "Even if you would rather not."

"Are you always going to address me with that righteous judgement, Doctor Lecter?" Will asks, but he's smiling, like he's humoring a petulant child. Clearly the stronger emotions and

stress that had driven him to such anger last night are no longer present.

"I do not like treating you badly, Will," Hannibal replies. He pauses to take a bite of gammon. "But sometimes I feel like that is the only thing you react to."

"Oh, I see," Will teases, "you abuse me for my own good."

Hannibal regards him, smiling when he sees that Will is as well. His expression is gentle, serene despite the fact that his skin stinks of pre-heat pheromones and there are dark circles under his eyes. His hair has calmed somewhat from his hands running through it, and with coffee and food he looks more alert and settled.

"I don't believe I should comment until you're cured," Hannibal replies.

Will laughs, warm and quiet. He smiles into his coffee cup and finishes his drink, his neck exposed for a moment that is at once fleeting, and feels like it lasts for a thousand years. Hannibal swallows and sets his knife and fork down, too distracted to eat.

Will sets the mug down with a gasp, eyes Hannibal's unfinished plate, and bites his lower lip. "I want to thank you," he says quietly, and the way his fingers idly brush the handle of his mug is incredibly distracting. He's fidgety, Hannibal can smell his nervousness, and he hums.

"Thank me for what?" he murmurs.

Will lets out a shaky laugh, and when he breathes in again it's through his teeth, like he's daring his scent glands to pick up anything except the smell of coffee and food. "You didn't have to give me anything," he says. "Hell, you didn't have to bring it. But you did. And you let me take Neutral even though...I know how you feel about meds like that. And you could'a done...a lot of things. But you didn't."

Hannibal nods. "Even though I am responsible for your physical wellbeing, it is your mental stability we are trying to achieve here, Will," he says. "Being forced to go into heat when you're not ready would have harmed you, in that regard."

"You were merciful," Will says. His fingers curl tightly around his mug. His shoulders tense up, roll back. "I know that's what you considered it. I saw your eyes."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "You find that...frightening," he says, trying to decipher the precise tightness of Will's mouth.

"It means you considered doing something else first," Will murmurs.

Hannibal makes a soft sound of assent – he cannot in any good conscience deny it. It would be an insult to Will and a lie too thin to be effective. "I shall speak plainly to you, as I have always tried to," he says. "You navigate the world knowing there is a target on your back. Your breed, your species, and then on top of that, your choice of career paints you as an object of simultaneous desire and interest. You are an *interesting* person, Will."

Will doesn't say anything. Hannibal watches him bite his lower lip, watches the pink flesh slide from between his teeth slowly like he's not willing to let it go.

"And that is to someone without gifts that you or I possess," Hannibal finishes, slowly. "A piece of art can be enjoyed by a colorblind man, but I think we'd both agree that the full spectrum makes it richer for being viewed."

Will smiles. "Is that what I am to you, Doctor Lecter?" he says. "A piece of art?"

"You're teasing me," Hannibal says, smiling.

"Alana says I do it when I'm uncomfortable," Will replies with a small shrug. He turns his gaze away and puts his eyes on the frying pan, sitting on top of the cooling hob. Hannibal wants to lean in and follow the tendon lining Will's throat with his tongue.

"Are you uncomfortable?"

"Nothing you can cure, I'm afraid," Will replies. He clears his throat and lowers his gaze to the counter. "How many of those shots did you bring?"

"I have five left," Hannibal replies. "On average, they will stay the side effects of heat for twelve hours. But there's no telling what your metabolism or withdrawal might do to exacerbate that."

"Shit," Will mutters, cupping his hand over his mouth. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath in, slowly, and lets it out again through his fingers. "What...do you think I should do?"

Hannibal blinks, startled by the question. He was prepared for Will to demand they go back, had arguments and counterarguments for Jack or Alana bringing them more of the drug, or upping his suppressant dose, or anything else. He had not been prepared for Will to ask for his advice.

Will opens his eyes and looks at him, the picture of helpless, agonized indecision, and he lowers his hand and curls it around his thigh and lets out one of the sweetest, prettiest whines Hannibal has ever heard. He swallows harshly and has to curl his fingers up tightly to stop them reaching out and pulling Will to him, stop him wrapping his hands tightly around Will's arms, his thighs, and put his teeth on Will's neck and fill Will's ears with the sound of his purr.

"Please, Hannibal," he whispers, and he whines Hannibal's name and it hits Hannibal as sharply and painfully as the knife Tobias stabbed into his thigh. He's knocked breathless by it. "Tell me what to do. I don't know what to do."

For a moment, all Hannibal can do is stare at Will. And Will regards him like a fallen gladiator waiting to see if his life will be spared. Indeed, Hannibal's blood, his instincts are roaring at him to lunge for Will, to chase and pin him and mount him, mark him inside and out so that everyone will know that this Omega is his mate, his perfect equal and opposite.

But he must be calmer than that. Rushing water instead of a raging fire. The time will come when he can loose his bloodlust and rutting rage on Will's body, mark his neck with his nails and pierce him and stain his insides, but not yet.

Not yet.

Hannibal gifts Will with a small, reassuring smile, and he reaches out and cups the back of Will's head like he did last night. Will goes lax, eager and wanting, and he braces himself against the counter with one forearm and turns to sit facing Hannibal.

"You trust me," Hannibal says, and it's not a question but Will still nods. His lips are parted, revealing the sweet slip of his tongue and the edge of his teeth, his eyes are heavy-lidded and burning as the feeling of Hannibal's placating touch settles over his shoulders like a leaden cloak. "The goal of this therapy is to put you at one with your most basic instincts. I believe there is no faster or more effective way to do that than to allow you to experience your heat."

Will sighs, but Hannibal knows he's trying to tense up and pull back. He can't, though, since Hannibal's touch is still so warm and firm on his head, easing him into a place that is not quite submission, but pliancy.

"Do you consider that a mercy, Doctor Lecter?" he whispers, stuttering the words out. Hannibal smiles and slides his thumb back under Will's ear, cupping his jaw and cheek gently, and forces Will to raise his eyes. They're glazed and golden, his expression lax. He's trembling and Hannibal can smell his scent getting sweeter, thicker in the air.

Hannibal hums and draws Will forward, until he has to slide across the stool to compensate and they're both almost at a danger of falling off and into each other. One of Will's knees is between Hannibal's and Will's arm is tense on the countertop. Hannibal reaches out with his other hand and he gently cups Will's other cheek and Will gasps, whines, and his free hand comes forward and braces against Hannibal's outermost thigh, squeezing tightly.

"I consider it a necessity," Hannibal says. This close, he can taste the glaze of the pineapple clinging to Will's lips in the air, breathe in the salt on his tongue. He brushes his thumbs across the dark circles under Will's eyes and Will's eyelids flutter and he bites back a soft moan. "I know, without a mate, it will not be pleasant for you. But I believe we must all go through the fire if we are ever to rise from the ashes."

Will licks his lips and closes his eyes. The arm on the countertop slides forward and his fingers greedily knot in Hannibal's sleeve, knuckles turning white. He tugs on it like he needs Hannibal closer, and Hannibal obliges as best he can, and then their foreheads are resting together and he can feel Will's fever-warm skin against his own. Their noses brush, and Will's lips part.

Wait.

"...I want to burn," Will says after one more quiet moment that feels like it lasts a century. He opens his eyes and Hannibal is too close to really see them, but he sees Will clench his jaw and suck in a deep breath so that the air comes in through his mouth. He's scenting Hannibal, he abruptly realizes, breathing in Hannibal's musk like he's desperate for it, and Hannibal is momentarily glad that he decided not to shower that morning. "But I'm afraid of what will rise after."

Hannibal smiles. "That's what I'm here for," he says.

Will lets out a small, shaky laugh. He doesn't move, either to draw away or press closer. The stasis is maddening. Hannibal can feel his teeth starting to itch. His fingers are desperate to curl and take, his tongue eager to taste Will's blood and command him to kneel.

But more than that, Hannibal feels a strange prickling behind his eyes. It feels almost like tears, but it's located more centrally than that, directly behind his iris. He blinks, his brow furrowing as he tries to figure out that sensation. It's so familiar, but distantly, like a long-forgotten tune to one of his favorite songs.

Will sucks in a breath and his grip on Hannibal tightens. "Alpha," he whispers, and it is then that Hannibal remembers where he's felt this sensation before. It's the feeling of his eyes changing color in the iris, showing the red that marks him as an Alpha.

He hums, lets his eyelids droop. He doesn't want Will to be afraid. Usually Alphas only go visibly red when they're close to rut, and Hannibal is not going to make Will anxious over the idea of being trapped in an isolated cabin with a rutting Alpha, so close to his heat.

"I'm going to take care of you, Will," Hannibal says, his voice little more than a rough growl.

Will shivers. He tilts his head, nuzzles Hannibal gently, closely enough that their lips brush. It's not a kiss, it lacks the intention and certainly the pressure for one, but Will's lips definitely touch the corner of Hannibal's mouth and it feels like a burn when he pulls back.

Hannibal wants to growl, tighten his hand, pull Will's mouth back to his and devour him. But Will needs the illusion of control, while he can still pretend to enjoy it. Will licks his lips and his hand goes from Hannibal's sleeve to his own mouth, fingertips brushing his lower lip *oh so gently*.

Hannibal lets go of Will's face and lets his hands drop and they pull apart like ripping sutures from a wound. Hannibal's eyes are still prickling, irritating, and Will's gold is practically glowing, molten like it's just as eager to touch Hannibal and burn him as the rest of Will is.

Will is quiet for a moment, then he looks down and swallows harshly. "I -." He clears his throat, swallows again. "I defer to your greater knowledge, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal blinks, and has to remember what they were talking about before Will touched him and his head went blank. "You consent to going into heat, and will not take any more suppressants or Neutral shots?" he asks, because when Will starts to panic he will need Will's clear acknowledgement to remind him that he decided to go this route.

Will nods. "Yes," he says, and Hannibal cocks his head to one side. Will clicks his tongue in the side of his mouth and looks down at his hands. They're shaking again. "You said you consider it your duty to accommodate my body's demands," he adds, and Hannibal nods with an accepting hum. "Where do you draw the line?"

Hannibal has to clench his jaw very tightly to stop himself purring. "You are referring to the sexual component of a heat," he says.

"You make it sound so clinical," Will whispers. "Have you ever been in rut, Doctor Lecter? Or been around an Omega in heat?"

"No," Hannibal says. "Not as a mature male."

"I'd like to see you talk so delicately when you are," Will replies, and it's a dark and promising smile that accompanies the words. He raises his eyes and meets Hannibal's for a second, before he sighs and pushes himself upright. He looks unsteady, as dainty and delicate as a parasol in a hurricane, but he remains upright so Hannibal cannot justify reaching for him. "I'd like to rest."

"Good," Hannibal says, nodding as Will walks towards the stairs. "Perhaps, if you're feeling up to it, we will go walk some of the pathways in the area this afternoon. The cool air will be good for you."

"Whatever you say," comes Will's muffled reply, and then he ascends the stairs and closes the door to his bedroom. Hannibal clears the plates, washes them, and wipes down the kitchen. The entire time, he can't seem to stop himself purring, and his eyes itch and prickle well past the point that the air is overwhelmed with the scent of cleanser and he can no longer smell Will at all.

Chapter 10

Despite his lethargy, Will comes back down the stairs just past lunch time, dressed to leave the cabin. Hannibal smiles at him and they don their coats and head out through the front yard, following the winding walkway that leads past the cliffside and down. It's a stone path, trees on one side and the cliffs on the other, and the wind is light and humid, putting a flush on Will's cheeks despite the coolness of the air.

Or, perhaps, it is because by Hannibal's estimates he has about three hours before his pre-heat symptoms are due to reappear. He cannot smell Will very well with the breeze taking Will's scent downwind, but if his calculations are accurate, they will not be able to walk for very long before Will runs the risk of becoming incoherent with heat.

They walk side by side, their hands in their pockets to protect them from the wind, scarves pulled up around their necks. It's a nice experience, and Hannibal looks forward to the time when he and Will might prowl through darker places, their eyes glowing and intent on their prey. He wonders if he could ever convince Will to come hunting with him, or if he would prefer to be the lure, the bait, and purr sweetly when Hannibal brings the meat home.

He shall have to teach Will to cook well enough to do them both justice.

Will hums, taking Hannibal out of his thoughts and putting his full attention on the Omega walking beside him. Hannibal's body is nearest the cliffside, unconsciously protective. "This feels very strange," he says. "I feel like a child when he first sees Christmas decorations go up in stores. I know it's coming, I can feel it, but it doesn't seem real until it happens."

"Do you believe your anticipation comes from whatever negative emotions you still attribute to being in heat?" Hannibal asks.

Will smiles, looking down. "You think I'm foolish," he says. "For having reservations. 'Negative emotions'."

"Not foolish," Hannibal replies. "I suppose I'm simply trying to understand. I have never met an Omega who regarded a natural phenomenon with such...distaste."

"And you're such an expert on my breed, aren't you?"

"I never said that."

Will hums again. When Hannibal turns to regard him, he sees that Will's irises are thick with gold again, his lips and cheeks the same dark pink from the wind and from his teeth. Will presses his lips together and tucks his nose into his scarf, rolling his shoulders.

He lifts his head again so that he can be heard. His gaze is on the stone path ahead of them. It will soon start to sharply turn and rise, up the ridge in a more purposeful walkway, and turn into running paths within the trees. Then, the loop continues and comes out on the main road

about a mile from the entrance to the highway. All in all it's about a three mile walk, just long enough to take time but not so long that it's too physically taxing for them both.

"I don't like the inevitability of it all," Will finally says. "I can't help feel your touch on the entire situation."

Hannibal hums. "Are we a victim of circumstance, or is circumstance a victim of us?"

"I went into rut," Will says, "because of a murder Jack called me to. I became your patient because Jack was worried about my mental health and wanted to cover his ass when and if I ever went crazy. And now, between one week and the next, I find myself in isolation and ready to go into heat for you."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and Will clears his throat. "*With* you," he corrects, and buries his nose again. "Go into heat with you."

Every word Will says has a spiderweb attached to it, but with heat involved, Will's more basic instincts are going to come out and color his words. Hannibal swallows and turns his gaze in front of him again, and his fingers clench up tight in his pockets.

"It's an unfortunate turn of events for you," he says, trying to keep his voice mild. "But I will say.... I can't help agreeing with Jack."

Will hums.

"Regardless of the location, I have to posit that you would have showed pre-heat symptoms whether you were under my care or not. The only difference is that doctors in an institution would have thrown you in solitary until it was over."

Of course, had Hannibal not interfered, Will would not have gone into heat at all. But he doesn't need to know that. It's a moot point anyway, since Will has promised not to take any more suppressants. His brain and his body will certainly thank him for it, once his natural ovulation cycle smooths out.

The first heat after suppressants is usually an infertile one, and stands a low chance of conception, but the bonding practice, and mating bites, and the creation of the Alpha and Omega Voice, is still very real. Hannibal can be patient when it comes to Will giving him children, but the bonding process is vital for his designs.

"That's true," Will finally says. Then, he sighs. "We didn't say it explicitly this morning, but I feel it's in both of our interests to be blunt about what's going to happen."

"I agree," Hannibal says, and is glad that the same breeze robbing him of indulging in Will's scent will also mean Will cannot smell how excited Hannibal is likely to get over the pending conversation.

"The last heat I had lasted almost five days," Will says, and Hannibal blinks, momentarily startled. Most Omegas have a heat for two to three days, with the exceptions of ones who come off of suppressants. If Will's natural heats lasted for so long, it's possible this one will

linger for almost a week, possibly more. "At its peak, I felt the urge for a knot almost every hour."

Hannibal swallows. This is all information he needs to know as Will's doctor, but he's finding it hard to think about these things in a clinical way. "I think I understand more, now," he murmurs. "Your obsession with living without a heat." Even without all the emotional baggage that comes with it, Will's heat cycle sounds inconvenient, more than anything else.

Will huffs a laugh, smiling. He slows to a stop and turns to regard Hannibal, and his eyes map Hannibal's face slowly, before he blinks and bites his lower lip. He clears his throat, tries to speak, swallows it back. Hannibal wants to speak to him plainly, but understands that Will must have the illusion of controlling the pace and intensity with which he gives his surrender.

"I think we both agree that, whatever our intentions were, you will have to knot me through my heat," Will finally says, clearing his throat. Hannibal swallows and nods, and blinks when he feels his eyes prickling. "I think it's important to lay out some ground rules."

Hannibal clears his throat and waits for Will to speak.

"We will not go in my nest," Will says. Hannibal nods again – it will be soothing for Will, when it's over, to return to a space that does not have Hannibal's scent in it. Of course, after they're bonded, Will may not want to leave Hannibal's side at all, but the important thing about control is that the subject must not be aware that they are under it. "Nor your bedroom, if that's what you want."

"I have no issue with using my bedroom," Hannibal replies. In fact, the idea of having Will's slick and sweet scent imprinted on his sheets delights him. "I would prefer to avoid the kitchen, for sanitary reasons." Will nods, presses his lips together, and clenches his jaw. The gold in his eyes is glowing and it occurs to Hannibal that he might not be the only one getting excited by his conversation.

He waits for any other rules. He expects Will to put in a rule in place against biting. He expects Will to demand they get birth control beforehand, or that Hannibal will consent to wearing condoms, or anything like that. He waits for Will to say he cannot touch Will unless Will asks for him, cannot initiate, cannot chase or mark him in any way.

He waits, but Will doesn't say anything like that. "Do you have any other rules?" Hannibal asks.

Will bites his lower lip and manages a small smile. "No," he replies.

Hannibal wants to let it go, but in the sake of his own self-interest, he cannot. "I want to be clear, then," he says, and Will nods. "For all intents and purposes, we are to approach this as though we are mated. You will allow me to bite you, and chase you, and everything else that would be expected in this dynamic."

Will swallows harshly enough that, even over the gentle rush of the waves and the cawing of sea birds, Hannibal can hear it. "Yes," he breathes, quiet as the wind, and looks down. Hannibal almost cannot believe he's hearing this. It is everything he wanted, everything he

planned for. He wants to reach out and touch Will, cup his neck and kiss him, do all the things that have been haunting his dreams for weeks now.

And here it is, within his grasp. So why does he hesitate?

Will shivers, something deeper than the chill in the air, and the wind changes just for long enough for Hannibal to get a lungful of his scent. He smells wonderful, crisp and fine, sweeter than normal. It makes Hannibal's mouth water and his teeth start to itch.

"Perhaps we should get you back to the cabin," Hannibal suggests, after another long moment of Will staring at his shoes and neither of them speaking. "I'll make something for us to eat."

Will nods, quietly accepting, and turns back the way they came. Neither of them speak until they reach the cabin, and Hannibal closes and locks the door behind them while Will sheds his coat and scarf. Within the warmth of the cabin, and without his coat as a barrier, Hannibal can smell Will plainly, and he finds himself taking deep inhales as he takes off and hangs his own coat, and unwraps his scarf from around his neck.

Will is sitting at the kitchen island. Hannibal wraps his scarf around one hand until it forms a neat roll, and sets it down, before he goes to the refrigerator and pulls out food for them both. Closer to the heat, it will be important that Will keeps up his energy. In that vein, he takes out potatoes, ground beef, and spring onions and carrots.

He pauses for a moment, and then retrieves a bag of large, sweet green grapes. He takes out a bowl and places them inside it to catch water, and sets it in front of Will on the counter.

"Eat," he coaxes. Will bites his lower lip and takes one, eats it almost daintily. Hannibal smiles and turns back to begin making their meal.

"Doctor Lecter," Will begins, and Hannibal hums to show he's heard, but does not turn his attention away from the oven. He lights one of the burners and sets a pan on it, drizzles oil inside and places the ground beef within the pan. It starts to sizzle almost immediately. "I asked you before, what you thought Jack said when I asked him why you volunteered to oversee my therapy."

"Yes," Hannibal says, and takes out a cutting board, placing the onions and carrots on top of it. His knives are sharpened to a gleaming edge and he takes one from the knife block and starts to slice the spring onions, and when he has a pile of small white rings he sets them to one side and takes the carrots over to wash and peel them.

"Now I want to ask *you* why you volunteered."

Hannibal goes still for a brief moment, before he shuts the water off and puts the carrots down. This is another instance where his choice of words will need to be *very* delicate. If he confesses to his intention to mate with Will from the beginning, Will may begin to look at his actions and situation with suspicion. But, if he says anything else, he runs the risk of Will sensing that he's lying.

He straightens up and turns, folding his arms across his chest. Will's eyes are on his bowl of grapes, he hasn't stopped eating and already half the bag is gone. Hannibal cocks his head to one side and Will's eyes skip in his direction, just for a second, before returning to the bowl. He looks so strangely vulnerable, and defensive. Like he's nervous for what Hannibal is going to say.

"You and I have known each other for several months now," he says, and Will bites his lip and nods. "When I first met you, I will admit that I was intrigued by your...well, I suppose I would call it a personality disorder, despite the negative connotations. You have a unique way of looking at the world, Will, and I find that uniqueness inspiring."

Will doesn't answer.

"You said I see potential in you," Hannibal says, and Will nods. "You were right. And I always have. At first, it was potential for a unique mind to study. Then, the potential for friendship. I suppose, organically, it simply grew from there."

"I don't understand," Will says, frowning. He looks up and his face is open, vulnerable, confused. "What grew?"

"My affection for you, Will," Hannibal says – openly, freely. He turns to meet Will's gaze and Will's eyes drop immediately, and he blushes. "And my.... I suppose it's my desire to see you happy, and safe. This therapy will help you, and I found the thought of some other doctor overseeing that...uncomfortable."

"You wanted me in your care because you didn't believe anyone else would do it right?" Will repeats, still sounding unsure.

"I wanted you to be in my care because I want to take care of you," Hannibal replies.

Will swallows, blinks like he's shell-shocked, and looks down at his bowl of grapes again.

"Well then," he starts, clearing his throat, "I suppose everything worked out for the best."

Hannibal frowns, wondering what that might mean. Will cannot possibly be aware of Hannibal's manipulation, of course not. Not all of it, at least.

But it occurs to Hannibal, not for the first time, that Will is a fisherman. And if he was aware that he was being hunted – if Hannibal's prey got smart – perhaps he has decided not to try and outrun his predator, but set up his own trap, and allow Hannibal to come to him.

The scent of cooking meat rouses Hannibal and he moves quickly, pulling the pan off of the burner before the meat overcooks. He takes a wooden spoon and starts to stir it, adding the spring onions as the meat turns brown.

He starts to chip the potatoes so that he can fry them quickly. He pre-heats the oven and finishes with the carrots, and sets those to one side. The meat is almost done and he scoops it out to line the beef and onions at the bottom of a baking dish.

Will is silent for a long time. Hannibal is dying to look at him, to try and understand what he's thinking, but he forces himself to finish making the food. He layers the meat and potatoes in the dish and covers it in a thin layer of cheese, and sets it in the oven to bake. Another low-brow meal, hardly suitable for the fine things Hannibal wishes to feed his mate, but for now it will do the job of keeping Will healthy and will mean he doesn't have to leave the cabin and do his usual hunting for his meal.

When he is finished, he puts the carrots in a bowl and sets them to one side. He will boil those closer to the time when the dish is done, so they will be warm and soft and serve as a side. He washes his hands and dries them on a hand towel, and finally allows himself to regard Will again.

Will hasn't moved. The bag of grapes is empty.

"It'll be about twenty minutes," he says, and Will nods slowly. "Do you need more to eat while we wait?"

Will shakes his head, and finally lifts his eyes. Hannibal can't tell what the emotion is, swirling in the gold. He feels uncomfortable, strangely vulnerable. If he didn't already know that Will has been reacting well to his placation, his presence, and hasn't already purred for him and kissed him – *almost* a kiss, *almost* – he would consider being afraid that all of his plans were for nothing.

Will clears his throat, swallows, parts his lips and then closes them again. "I..." His fingers wrap around the edges of the bag and it crinkles loudly in the silence. His fingers are trembling. "I have questions. But I feel as if I already know the answers."

"You won't know until you ask," Hannibal replies.

"You might lie to me."

"Do you believe I would?"

"Maybe," Will whispers, clenching his jaw. "I think you would do anything, say anything, to keep me here. Especially now."

Now that Will is approaching his heat. Now that Hannibal knows what his sweat smells like and knows the paleness of his skin on the insides of his thighs. Now that Hannibal has put his hands in Will's hair and felt the heat of his slick.

He doesn't sound angry by the idea. If Hannibal didn't know any better – and perhaps he doesn't – he'd say Will sounded smug.

"You don't need to be afraid," Hannibal says.

Will shakes his head. "I'm not afraid," he replies.

Hannibal hums, and lifts his eyes to the doorway. He sets a timer for eighteen minutes and then circles the kitchen counter and holds his hand out to Will. Will regards it, but takes it quickly, like he's moving on autopilot.

"Come with me," Hannibal says, and laces their fingers together. Will's fingers are callused from his gun, his palm warm in Hannibal's as Hannibal leads them to the sitting area. He turns and takes Will's hand in his free one, so that he's holding both of them. Will's cheeks darken and his lips part when he breathes in, definitely scenting Hannibal this time, and he swallows harshly.

"Will," Hannibal murmurs, and Will lifts his eyes so their gazes meet. Will's scent is thick and sweet like agave, sharp like mint and cinnamon. They're standing close enough that if Hannibal were to lean in, Will wouldn't be able to flinch away fast enough. Hannibal lets go of one of his hands and cups his jaw and Will's eyes are wide, his expression plaintive like he's searching for direction in Hannibal's eyes. "You trust me, right?"

Will swallows and lets out a small, sweet whine. "Yes," he says, and lifts his hand to wrap his fingers around Hannibal's wrist.

Hannibal smiles, and pulls Will closer by his jaw and his wrist. Will steps into his space and he shivers, dipping his head into Hannibal's palm, and Hannibal hums and presses his nose against the windswept curls at the side of Will's head.

"I'd like you to sit with me," he says, and doesn't miss how Will trembles at the feeling of Hannibal's mouth so close to his neck. Will nods, slowly, and Hannibal takes a step back, pulling Will to him, and sits on one of the couches. It forces Will to follow almost immediately and he lands in an awkward sprawl across Hannibal's lap.

Will lets out a quiet, startled whine, and Hannibal tightens his hand, slides it into Will's hair, and forces their foreheads together. He shushes Will like he might a wild horse, knowing his touch in Will's hair will placate him enough to be pliant. He puts his other hand on Will's flank and eases him into the more natural position of straddling Hannibal's lap, his thighs falling into place on the outside of Hannibal's and his hips settling heavily on Hannibal's body.

Will is letting out a stream of almost imperceptible whines, evolved by Omegas to be used in quiet, intimate moments. Women cannot hear these kinds of noises, and they're soft enough that only an Alpha at the Omega's throat can really discern them. They're tender, quiet pleas for an Alpha's better nature. They're the cry of an Omega who knows he's vulnerable and is begging for mercy.

Hannibal has no intention of harming Will. Not until he asks for it.

"Shh," Hannibal says again, slowly stroking down Will's flank. His fingers map the edge of his ribs, the soft give of his waist. His thumb catches on the jut of Will's hipbone and then reaches the rough edge of his jeans. Will gasps, his eyelids fluttering and then closing. His hands land on Hannibal's shoulders and fist tight.

"Hannibal," he whispers. It's another version of his Omega whine. He calls Hannibal by name to appeal to his better nature, to tug on whatever affection Hannibal admits he has for Will. Will had said he wasn't afraid but his instincts are telling him there's a monster in his home and Hannibal can smell the thin threads of distress in his scent, creating a sharp aftertaste for the sweetness.

Hannibal knows there's not much more he can say to ease Will's mind. So, he does the only thing he can.

He starts to purr.

Will sucks in a deep breath and immediately burrows closer. One of his hands slides to rest over Hannibal's chest, and he ducks his head and puts his ear against Hannibal's shoulder, his face turned away from Hannibal's neck, so that he can hear it better. Hannibal smiles, loosening his hold on Will's hair, and pets it away from his face. His other hand slides around Will's back and settles along the natural dip of his spine, cradling him close.

It's a little awkward, and Hannibal pushes himself upright and forces Will back. Will lets out a plaintive, sweet sound and Hannibal shushes him again.

"Come here," he says, and Will's eyes are glazed, his face slack, and he nods dumbly as Hannibal twists his body so that his back is braced against the high armrest of the couch. He stretches his legs out on the couch and Will immediately sinks against him, stretching out so that he's lying across Hannibal's chest, his stomach, and settles over his legs.

Will smiles at him, nuzzling against Hannibal's collarbone, and then relaxes with a sigh, his ear against Hannibal's chest, one hand resting lightly on the place where Hannibal's stomach lifts and falls with his breaths. Hannibal keeps his hand in Will's hair and settles the other one on Will's shoulder, thumb idly brushing back and forth and tracing the line of stitching at his sleeve.

"I've never heard an Alpha purr before," Will whispers after a moment. He sounds drugged, his words slurring. "Well, except family, when I was younger."

"You have gone a long time without allowing yourself to bond to anyone," Hannibal replies. Will swallows, his fingers curling loosely on Hannibal's stomach. "I'll confess, since we promised to speak plainly to each other – I'm moved by your trust in me, Will."

Will hums. "You've done nothing to make me think twice about it," he replies, voice soft and sleepy. Hannibal remembers Will's remark at the kitchen island. He presses his lips together.

"I'm surprised that you're willing to do this with me," he says.

"Why is that?"

"Well, I suppose I would say that I never had any indication you would be willing. We are men of evidence, Will, and if you have been entertaining *any* thoughts regarding our friendship, or whatever has grown out of it, you left nothing for me to examine."

Which, now Hannibal thinks about it, might have been by design.

Will laughs. "Tell me, Doctor Lecter," he says, and doesn't raise his head, "do you really think I gave no sign?"

Hannibal huffs. "Well, then I think it very manipulative of you, to let me get so attached before you showed any affection back."

Will laughs again, the sound rich and sweet and happy. "It was never my intention," he replies, and sighs, humming. "But at the risk of stating the obvious, I have a lot more to lose than you do from bad choices."

Not entirely true, but Hannibal knows what Will means. "So you *do* admit to some deviousness on your part," he says, and makes sure Will can hear the humor in his voice.

Will lifts his head and drags his hand up so that he can rest his chin on the back of his hand. "Jack told me you intended to mate with me," he says. Hannibal blinks at him, momentarily aggravated at Jack since they had discussed this very thing. "He wanted to make sure he had my consent before you tried."

Understandable. Forgivable, *maybe*. Hannibal hums, lifting his eyes to the ceiling so that Will doesn't see the flicker of angry red in them. "When did he tell you this?" he asks.

"The morning you came to get me," Will says. So, after Will agreed to the therapy, but before he actually got here. Which means Will had time to back out of it and change his mind. He had the chance, but he didn't take it.

"And you still decided to come with me?"

Will smiles, lopsided and small. "Yes," he replies. "When I look at you, I *see*."

"What kinds of things do you see?" Hannibal asks, and looks back at Will, feeling the burn behind his eyes fading away and knowing he has a handle on his red again.

"...I suppose you'd call it potential."

Hannibal swallows, and his purr stops. Will smiles, ducking his gaze down, and moves his hand so that he can rest his cheek on Hannibal's chest. He sighs and Hannibal's hand tightens in his hair. Hannibal pushes himself upright and Will follows, straddling Hannibal's thighs, on his knees so he doesn't put all his weight on the Alpha, his hands finding familiar places on Hannibal's shoulders.

Hannibal slides his other hand up from Will's shoulders, presses it flat along the collar of his shirt. His thumb finds the hollow of Will's throat, he spreads his fingers out and fits them under Will's jaw and he squeezes Will's neck *very* gently.

Will gasps, his lips parting, and his nails dig into Hannibal's shoulders.

"Please," he whispers, and Hannibal finds no power in him to resist.

He pulls Will close by the neck and kisses him. Will lets out a soft, wanton moan, sliding close until their chests are touching and he cups his hands around the back of Hannibal's neck, forcing his head up as Will parts his jaws and allows Hannibal's tongue between his teeth. Hannibal tastes the sweetness of the grapes in Will's mouth, drinks his soft moan like fine wine.

Will pulls back, gasping, but Hannibal only allows him a breath before he pulls Will close again. His hand leaves Will's neck and he encircles Will's waist, hauling him as close as he

can and Will goes eagerly, kissing him back with just as much passion and fervor.

Hannibal lets out a low growl and tucks his feet, grabs Will tightly, and rolls them. The armrest forces Will to sit up for a second but then Hannibal puts both hands on Will's hips and yanks him down, smothered, onto his back, and he covers Will with his bigger weight, his stronger body.

Will shivers, spreading his legs for Hannibal to settle between his thighs. When Hannibal kisses him again, they're both purring.

Will's purr is a beautiful sound. It stutters, he can't do it while he's gasping but Hannibal can hear it in time with his heaving chest, his racing heart. Hannibal wraps one arm around Will's head, blocks his sight with his bicep and pins Will down by the hip with his other hand. It's a powerful stance, one evolved for Alphas asserting their dominance over their Omegas outside of a sexual setting. Closing off an Omega's sightlines and forcing them to only see, hear, and smell their Alpha has a powerful effect.

Will moans against Hannibal's mouth, slides his hands against Hannibal's chest and paws at his clothes. Will is starting to sweat, trembling under Hannibal's weight, but he meets every kiss with the eager sweetness of a virgin in love.

Hannibal wants to devour him whole, soak himself in Will's sweat and slick, and stain his neck with blood and his insides with Hannibal's release. He wants to smell Will's slick and know it's there because of him. He wants -.

The kitchen timer goes off, beeping rapidly, and Will growls. "Ignore it," he demands, and Hannibal pulls back with a huff. His hair is falling in front of his eyes, and Will looks up at him, a picture of ravishment, his lips red, cheeks and neck flushed, hair splayed out in a wide, dark halo.

He looks beautiful, and Hannibal could easily obey his demands and ignore it, but; "You need to eat," he says, and leans down to nuzzle the frown from Will's brow, and he kisses the growl Will lets out. Then, he rises, and holds out a hand, and Will takes it. He's unsteady and shaking, halfway to heat already.

He coaxes Will to the kitchen and has him sit. The carrots didn't have time to boil, but he figures he can let that go. He has other priorities now. He takes a spatula and scoops out a large portion of the meat and potatoes onto a plate for Will, and sets it down, and takes a smaller one for himself.

He carries it over to the other bar stool and sits. Will's knee swings out and touches his, and Hannibal smiles.

"Eat," he says, nodding to the food, and Will takes the first bite. Will's purr splits the air between them, and he doesn't stop. He doesn't apologize.

He's not ashamed. Hannibal smiles.

Chapter 11

When lunch is over, they do not lunge for each other like fighting dogs, desperate to get at each other's throats. They do not circle each other, hissing and puffed up as cats will in an alley, fighting over a scrap of tuna. Will cleans his plate and Hannibal gathers the dishes and places them in the sink. He covers the rest of the casserole with clingfilm and puts it in the fridge.

Will is quiet, a silent and thrumming silhouette of heat and anticipation. His scent overpowers the smell of ground beef and potatoes, of cleanser and the open air clinging to their clothes. He smells warm, sweet, and appears as eager as a puppy is to leap into a child's arms.

Hannibal leaves the dishes to soak and wipes his hands, sets the carrots back in the fridge, and throws away the empty bag of grapes and sets the bowl with the plates in the sink. He washes his hands one more time, and when he turns to regard Will, he sees that Will is staring at his own hands, biting his lower lip.

His fingers curl, trembling finely. Hannibal circles the kitchen island and takes both of Will's hands in his own. Will sucks in a breath and turns on the bar stool, tilting his head up to meet Hannibal's eyes. His irises are a deep, molten gold, complimenting the pretty stain of pink on his cheeks.

Hannibal lets his hands go, and cups his jaw instead, forcing Will to straighten. His eyelids flutter and he lets out a soft breath, and Hannibal smiles, and leans down, and kisses him chastely. Will moans, his lips parting, and Hannibal tilts his head and catches Will's lower lip between his teeth, gently biting down.

Will reaches for him, hands curling desperately in Hannibal's clothing where it's pulled tight across his back. He slides forward on the bar stool and, unsatisfied with how much their bodies touch when he does, Will pushes himself to his feet and pulls Hannibal closer, his whole body arching so that he can feel Hannibal's strength and savor the feeling of an Alpha, large and powerful against him.

Hannibal rewards Will with a soft growl, pulling back to see how his teeth have left a blushing redness behind on Will's lip. Will's tongue slides out to taste Hannibal on his mouth, and his jaws are parted so he can scent Hannibal as best he can.

Hannibal smiles, and Will smiles back, shaky and shivering. He's not afraid, not anymore. He's too eager and wanting, his brain flooded with the feelings of safety and security he associates with Hannibal's scent, the feelings Hannibal took such great care to cultivate and grow.

An Alpha's saliva contains a hormone that triggers the slick response in an Omega, and the arousal in a woman. Omegas can get slick without being kissed, but kissing them, wet and wanting, speeds up the process by a considerable amount. And, if Hannibal conditions and trains Will just right, eventually he won't even have to touch Will to get him to react. A simple look, a growl, the right catch of his scent – one day that will be enough for Will to get

slick for him, burn the blue and green out of his eyes to make way for the gold, sweeten his blood and make him bare his neck.

Will trembles against him, and Hannibal lets out another soft rumble, sliding his thumbs behind the edges of Will's jaw, forcing his head back and putting pressure on the soft underside. Will's eyes go heavy-lidded, and when Hannibal drags his nails down either side of his throat, Will goes stiff and lets out a quiet, plaintive whine.

"Shh," Hannibal murmurs, stepping close. He can feel Will's hands clinging to his back, watches how Will's neck flexes when he swallows. "Trust me."

Will presses his lips together and nods, and Hannibal smiles and, in another reward, tilts Will's head to one side and moves one hand to place a gentle, open-mouthed kiss on the side of his neck. Will lets out a soft moan and Hannibal catches him when Will's knees buckle. He cradles his Omega close and turns them so that Will can hold himself up against the kitchen counter.

Will's blood is sweetest here, his pulse rushing below Hannibal's lips, eager to leap up and spill into his mouth. He parts his jaws and licks over the sensitive spot between Will's collarbone and the tendons at the front of his throat and Will whimpers.

Every sound he pulls is delightful in its sweetness, addictive with how harshly Will is trembling. Hannibal is the first Alpha he's shared his heat with, the first Alpha he's allowed near his throat in God knows how long, and his surrender is as hard-given as it is hard-won. Hannibal's hand gentles where it still is on Will's neck, his other one wrapped around Will's hip to keep him upright.

He pulls back when he feels his eyes start to prickle, showing his red, and Will bites his lower lip and leans up for another kiss that Hannibal eagerly grants him. "I think..." Will clears his throat, licks his lips. His eyes are glazed, his mouth slack. "I think we would both benefit from being off our feet, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal smiles. "I agree," he says, and steps back. Will trembles, his hand flying back to grab onto the counter when Hannibal's touch leaves him, like Hannibal's strength was the only thing keeping him upright.

Will raises his head, his breathing unsteady. There's a wildness in his eyes, something desperate and half-feral, like Hannibal saw in the hotel gym when this whole thing started. He cocks his head to one side, his eyes raking Will up and down.

The chase is an outdated, but revered part of the mating process. It used to be the case that Alphas would track and hunt their Omegas for miles, through wild forests and undergrowth, past exhaustion and strain, for the right to mate with them. Until their Omega of choice was too exhausted to keep running and too spent to fight them off.

With things like society and language, that practice has reduced in severity dramatically. If the mated pair have land, they might indulge every now and again, and in competitive, underdeveloped countries it is still common practice, but Hannibal had always understood that, if he were to ever pursue an Omega, the chase itself would be short.

The hunt has been more than capable of making up for it.

But looking at Will's face, it occurs to him that just because Omegas are usually the ones being chased, doesn't mean they *have* to be. Will looks ravenous, his upper lip curling back like he's fighting the urge to snarl.

Hannibal takes a step back and Will's eyes flash.

The thought of driving his Omega so mad that he would physically pursue Hannibal is... mouthwatering.

Hannibal straightens, and so does Will. He takes another step back and Will lets out a soft growl, knuckles white on the countertop. He reeks of slick and his eyes have none of the original color left to them. He's driven entirely by his instincts right now, just as Hannibal wants him.

Hannibal smiles, indulgent and soft, and then he turns and leaves the kitchen. He doesn't run, he knows that Will is in no condition to really chase him, but he hears the bar stools scrape across the kitchen floor as Will pursues him.

He walks into the middle of the square of couches and turns to regard Will. Will is leaning heavily on the doorway to the kitchen, his nails digging into the wood, jaws parted. He meets Hannibal's eyes and rubs his jaw against the place where door hinges used to be. His hands slide down the side and then he steps forward, into the living room.

Hannibal takes a step back until his calves hit the coffee table and Will snarls, lunging forward, catching himself on the back of the couch. He slides his hands out to either side of him, hunched and staring at Hannibal like Hannibal's touch holds the antidote to a poison raging through his body.

Hannibal smiles, and lifts his hands so that he can unfasten the buttons at the ends of his sleeves. Will's eyes drop to the motion and he licks his lips again, nails tightening in the soft leather of Hannibal's couch.

His hands slide out again and Hannibal realized he's scent-marking the furniture, satisfying the Omega need to render Hannibal and everything in this place as *his*. It's a primitive instinct, but Will is in no state to pay attention to higher brain function now. It won't be long before he has no thought in him but to breed, and Hannibal looks to that moment like, to use Will's words, a child awaits Christmas morning.

Hannibal finishes with his sleeves and rolls them up to past his elbows. Will lets out a soft, pleading whine. His shoulders roll and tense. He hasn't tried to circle the couch. Maybe he can't figure out how to.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, and holds his hand out, curved to perfectly cradle Will's face. Will whimpers, pressing himself flat to the back of the couch like he can reach from there.

"Come to me, Will," Hannibal says, and Will gasps, sagging. His knees buckle and he claws at the couch, finds the edge of it and hauls himself around it slowly. He claws his way through the opening of the two couches and fits his cheek into Hannibal's palm with something like a sob. Hannibal smiles and threads his hand through Will's sweaty hair and cradles his forehead against Hannibal's chest.

Will's fingers curl up against Hannibal's chest, he tucks himself under Hannibal's arm like a frightened child, and nuzzles Hannibal's throat when Hannibal leans down to kiss his hair. Will tilts his head up and finds Hannibal's lips with his own, and this time when he kisses Hannibal, he has a hand in Hannibal's hair in return, nails scratching pleasantly across Hannibal's scalp, desperate to keep Hannibal close to him.

Hannibal growls and turns them, coaxes Will onto his back on the long side of the couch and covers him. Will gasps weakly, flattening his hands on Hannibal's chest and down to spread his scent, his thighs parting to allow Hannibal between them.

"I regret teasing you so much, now," Will murmurs, as Hannibal settles between his legs. "Clearly you've run out of mercy."

Hannibal huffs a small laugh, pulling back enough that he can see the dazed, exasperated smile on Will's face. "Is my attempt to move slowly proving torturous, Will?" he asks.

"I don't know why you're moving slowly," Will replies, biting his lower lip. His hands can't stop idly tracing Hannibal's chest, down to his stomach. Hannibal suspects Will is trying to unbutton and untuck his shirt without making it obvious. "I'm here, and I'm willing."

Hannibal hums, smiling. "Perhaps I simply wish to enjoy my work of art," he says, and leans down to kiss and swallow the soft laugh Will answers him with. Will, it seems, loses the battle with his own impatience, as his fingers grab onto Hannibal's shirt and pull it out from his suit pants.

Hannibal growls, and parts his lips enough that Will feels his teeth against his jaw. "Careful, dear one," he says. He slides his hands down Will's arms, finds the sensitive skin on his wrists, and wrap his hands around Will's wrists, pinning them above his head. "I will only indulge you to a point."

Will swallows harshly, and, since he is unable to use his hands, he leans up to brush his cheek against Hannibal's, and turns his head to rub his nose under Hannibal's jaw. It's a lovely, instinctual move to mark his Alpha as his mate, tease at the place where Will is going to bite him once Hannibal has knotted and bitten him first.

Hannibal shivers, growling, and lets his wrists go. Will keeps them where they are, pinned by his head, and allows Hannibal to rear up and regard him.

He cocks his head to one side. There is so much of Will he wants to explore, but Will is right – as heat-mad as he is, he will become much worse before Hannibal drinks his fill. Will is wearing jeans, his feet bare since he came inside, and a long-sleeved blue-green shirt that perfectly matches his eyes when they're not overwhelmed with gold. All easy things to take off and discard, and Hannibal wonders if he thought about that on purpose.

He slides his hands down Will's heaving chest, smiles when Will arches up into him, his thighs splayed wide around Hannibal's, and Hannibal dips his fingers under the hem of Will's shirt and touches his warm, soft skin.

Will's eyelids flutter, he bites his lower lip and turns his head to one side, baring his neck as Hannibal pushes his shirt up to his collarbones. He keeps tugging and Will sits up just enough for Hannibal to get it over his head and off to one side.

Will is...beautiful. Of course he is – most Omegas are blessed with a certain aesthetic charm – but still Hannibal cannot help be struck mute at the sight of Will's flushed chest. He's fine-cut and strong, his shoulders and chest broad enough to hint at a manual trade, his stomach soft, just enough room there to harbor a child. He's smooth like most of his breed, with only a thin trail of hair between his navel and the hem of his jeans.

Hannibal's mouth is watering. His teeth itch to devour, his eyes burn. He flattens his hands on Will's chest and catches the hitch of his breath, the stutter of his heart.

Hannibal raises his eyes and Will meets him, open-mouthed, wanting. Hannibal can't resist – he leans down and catches Will's lips, puts one hand back in his hair and cradles him up from the couch, forcing him to move his arms, put weight on his elbows, and arch up into Hannibal's touch. He moans when Hannibal's fingers graze one of his nipples and it immediately hardens at his touch. He'll probably taste sweet here, too, once he becomes a mother.

Hannibal growls and tightens his hand in Will's hair, earning another soft, needy sound from the Omega pinned below him. Now that he's this close, now that he's shedding Will's clothes and his barriers and exposing the raw, needy animal that lurks under his skin, he can smell Will's slick in the air.

Will gasps against him, desperate for air, and Hannibal growls and forces him into another kiss, his hand sliding down Will's chest and going to the button and zipper of his jeans. Will is shaking, using his point of leverage to arch his hips up into Hannibal's touch.

"Please," he whispers, voice cracking on the word in such a delicious way. Hannibal rewards Will's desperation with a purr of his own, pulling the halves of his jeans apart and sliding his hand beneath Will's underwear, following the damp, soft hair until he reaches Will's cock. He wraps his fingers around it and coaxes it free to rest against Will's stomach.

Will shivers, unable to hold himself up, and collapses against the couch with a gasp. Hannibal follows him – he has Will now, his pretty Omega prey under him and between his teeth, and he will not allow Will to retreat. He gently strokes Will's cock, tight enough to earn a hiss, and Will bares his teeth and tilts his head back, exposing his throat to Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal kisses his pulse, suckles at the sweat-sweet skin like a child at its mother's breast, and Will's hand wraps around the back of his head, cradles and encourages him as Will shivers and moans beneath him.

Hannibal's sense of smell is completely overwhelmed by Will. He thinks he could take twenty showers and scrub this place from rafter to floorboard and still feel Will on the back

of his tongue, deep in his lungs and in his nose.

Will whimpers and arches up into his touch, his other hand clawing desperately at Hannibal's sleeve. His entire body arches, from the base of his neck to his tailbone, and Hannibal swallows when he smells Will's slick even more potently. He's aroused, leaking onto his stomach from his cockhead, the heat of his slick is warm enough that Hannibal can feel it against his stomach. Will is a prize breeding dog, a champion pedigree, and Hannibal must have him.

He rears back and growls when Will tries to follow him. He puts his hand on Will's neck and sets his weight there and Will swallows, going pliant and lax when Hannibal shows his teeth.

"I'm going to let you up," he says, and Will's eyes flash and he nods. "When I do, you're going to take the rest of your clothes off, and you're going to get ready to be mounted."

Will's gold irises are thin around his pupil. He's whining – soft, sweet things that are evolved to tug on Hannibal's basic instincts, drive him crazy with the need to care for and provide for his mate. And despite Hannibal's intentions, despite his evolved brain telling him he needs to stay in control, he knows it's working. Hannibal might be a prime Alpha, but Will is a whole new kind of his own breed, and Hannibal knew that, he wouldn't have pursued Will otherwise, but now he's starting to understand just what that means.

He squeezes his fingers around Will's throat, digs his nails in for emphasis, and Will shakes under him and tilts his head to one side in supplication.

Hannibal growls and lets him go. He stands, and Will pushes his jeans and underwear down his thighs, then kicks them off. His pale thighs are shining with his slick, the flush on his neck has started to stain the middle of his chest.

He catches Hannibal's eye, breathing heavy and uneven, and then he rolls onto his hands and knees. He's beautiful, breathtaking, the muscles in his shoulders and thighs a perfect curvature counterpart to the sharp planes of his ribs, the cut of his jaw that Hannibal wants to mark with his teeth.

Then Will sucks in a breath and sinks to his elbows, his back curves down and his thighs spread as much as they can on the couch, and Hannibal thinks he has never seen a more unique and more enthralling work of art.

"Oh, my beautiful boy," he whispers, too low, he is sure, for Will to hear. He swallows back his mouthful of saliva and steps up to Will's side. He drags his thumb down the sweat-damp dip of Will's spine, marks the hollow of dimples above the curve of his ass, and slides his hand up to perfectly cover the nape of Will's neck.

He tightens his hand and Will sucks in a breath, hangs his head, and sinks down until his chest touches the couch. He stretches his arms out in front of him, not just ready to be mounted now, but screaming for it. His body is perfectly angled for an Alpha to sink into him and plant his seed deep, have it pool where Will is most fertile, where his body will graciously accept Hannibal's gift, his legacy, and grow round and heavy with the harvest.

With his fingers at Will's most sensitive, placative point, he takes his other hand and smooths it across Will's tailbone, and then turns his hand and lets the pad of his middle finger sink down and across Will's slick, sweet hole.

Will whimpers, his fingers curling in the couch cushions. Hannibal can feel the tremble in his thighs, feel how he wants to tense up and shy away, but Hannibal has him caged and caught, his beautiful leashed animal, and Hannibal suppresses a smile when he tightens his hand on Will's nape and sinks his finger into Will's slick hole.

Will parts for him easily, his body slick and welcoming, and Hannibal watches the tremble run up his spine, dampen his skin and darken his hair. He leans down and presses his nose to Will's curls, taking in a deep, open-mouthed inhale when he curls his finger inside of Will, stretching him out and forcing him to accept Hannibal's touch inside of him.

His Omega is a static mess of energy. He wants to move, to touch Hannibal, claw and whine for him and beg him, but he's muzzled and frozen by Hannibal's hand on his neck. Hannibal thinks of putting Will in a collar so that he has constant pressure against his nape, and cannot move unless Hannibal uses his Alpha Voice and commands him to do so.

His stomach gives a tight clench of arousal, and he lets out a purr that he knows Will hears. Will makes a gasped, desperate noise, the couch leather creaks as his hands close into fists.

"Please," he moans, arching up as high as he can, ravenous for Hannibal to penetrate him. "*Alpha*."

Hannibal growls and digs his nails into Will's neck. "No," he says, and Will's heart and his breathing stutter. "You will call me by name, or nothing at all."

"*Hannibal*," Will immediately says, and he turns his head and nuzzles Hannibal's thigh, desperate to appease his Alpha, needing his forgiveness. Hannibal allows a soothing rumble – Will is in pre-heat, after all, and he is learning. But he will learn.

He pulls his finger out of Will and admires the shine of his slick in the light. He brings it to his mouth to taste, closing his eyes at the flavor. Sweet, minty, rich like chocolate. Hannibal will have to experiment to create a dessert half as satisfying as Will's slick is.

He hums and wipes his finger on Will's back, then leans down. "Stay very still for me, darling," he murmurs, and Will swallows harshly, nodding. Hannibal lets go of his neck, pleased when Will obeys and doesn't move. Hannibal unbuttons his loose shirt and then turns his attention to his belt. He pulls it free and, after a moment of consideration, sets it to one side.

He will wait until Will is truly his to put it around his throat. Will's neck must remain exposed, to allow room for his teeth.

He unfastens his suit pants and climbs onto the couch behind Will, letting the material pool around his thighs. Then, he pushes his underwear down. His cock is red and warm to the touch, hard in his hand. Hannibal's jaw clenches and he takes a deep breath through his nose, and lays his cockhead through the slick between Will's thighs.

Will sucks in a tight breath, a high-pitched whine stuck in his throat. "*Please*," he whispers, and it's like he's trying to fold even more, angle his body more sharply to take Hannibal into him. As if he could put his womb any lower, offer himself up any more sweetly. It's beautiful, watching him try.

Hannibal flattens his hands on Will, pulling him apart and exposing his pink, slick hole. He doesn't ask if Will is sure, if Will is ready – at this point, Hannibal isn't sure either of them have the ability to stop. He lets go with one hand and wraps his fingers around the head of his cock, pushes it against Will's hole, and slowly pulls him back with his other hand. Will's body tenses, shudders, gives all in the same breath, and Hannibal snarls when he watches himself sink inside.

The feeling he'd had after killing Tobias rears up in him, roaring in triumph. The only thing that could make this moment any sweeter would be the blood of a rival Alpha in his teeth. He swallows back his urge to roar, flattens his hands over Will's hipbones, and pulls him back until the backs of his thighs touch Hannibal's.

"*God*," Will growls, his head tilted to one side as he hisses the word. Hannibal can't stop the purr in his chest as he feels Will's body spasm and clench around him, he's sure it's been a long time since Will had anything inside of him, more than toys or his fingers. Will's body is clenching around him like he's going into shock, he's shaking and sweaty, and Hannibal slides his hands up either side of Will's spine and cups his shoulders, hauls him up to his hands.

Will moans, head tilted back when Hannibal wraps a hand around his throat. "*Please*," he whispers, reaching back and bracing his hand on Hannibal's bare thigh. "Hannibal, *please*."

"Move for me, Will," Hannibal rasps. "Show your Alpha how badly you need him."

Will's eyelids flutter, his stomach tenses up when he moves. He reaches out and braces his hands on the armrest, bowing his head even though it means Hannibal's hand is putting more pressure on his neck. He rolls forward and arches back, coaxing Hannibal's cock from his body only to welcome it back, graciously, ravenously.

Hannibal growls, his other hand tight on Will's hipbone, tight enough to bruise. He wants to rake his nails across Will's chest, wants to rip into him and take his heart, wants to flay his thighs until he can't run away, wants to bite his throat until he can't scream.

He growls, shifting his weight, and forces Will back by the neck so that he lets go. He moves his hand and pushes on the back of Will's neck, forcing his head back down, back into the classic mounting position that will allow Hannibal to fuck and cover him in the way their instincts are demanding they do.

Will writhes under him, little more than an animal, and Hannibal tightens his grip and allows himself to cover Will. Will's back arches against his chest where it's exposed by his shirt, his sweat stains Hannibal's clothing and skin, scent-marking his Alpha just as Hannibal is claiming him in return.

"Hannibal," Will whispers, and he gasps when Hannibal starts to thrust – deep, brutal things that fill the room with the chorus of skin hitting skin, Will's punched-out moans and

Hannibal's low growl creating a base note for the drum. Will reaches back with one hand, fists it in Hannibal's hair, drags Hannibal's mouth to the nape of his neck and bows his head to expose it. "Please, *please*."

Hannibal bares his teeth, licks along Will's sweaty skin. Desire is burning in his stomach, he knows he's being rougher than Will might like, but Will doesn't seem to mind in the slightest. His blood and his skin is stained with his arousal, he smells like he's in rapture. Pure ecstasy.

He can't take it anymore. Will is offering him everything and Hannibal wants to take it. He *deserves* it. He has his prey, screaming and caught in his trap, and now it is Hannibal's right as victor to claim what is his.

He parts his jaws, sets his teeth wide on the back of Will's neck, and bites down hard enough that his fangs split Will's skin and Will's blood floods his mouth.

Will flinches, curls up under him, and Hannibal lets out a rough snarl of victory when he feels Will start to bear down around him. Hannibal lets go of his hips, wraps his arms around Will's chest instead, knowing that between his teeth in Will's neck and his weight on Will's back, Will is utterly consumed and covered and will be soothed by that fact.

Hannibal licks the blood from Will's neck as Will shakes through his orgasm, slides his hands down Will's straining arms and wraps his hands around Will's wrists. He fucks in again, snarling at the feeling of Will's spasming, spent body trying so eagerly to milk his knot, ready to make it grow and stick them together so that Hannibal can fill Will with his seed.

He slows, thrusts in all the way, and Will starts to purr. The vibrations of his chest travel down his spine, into Hannibal's body, and he growls, tightens his hands, and bites down on Will's shoulder as he ruts against Will's ass, encouraging his knot to swell.

It does, splitting Will apart and tying them together, and then Hannibal's eyes close as he feels his release start to spurt out of him, rhythmic clenches of his stomach timed to perfectly suit the aftershocks that Will is still shaking with.

Will gasps, turns his head to one side, and Hannibal purrs and leans down so that he can catch Will's mouth. He cradles Will's jaw gently, mindful of his sore neck, and steals the breath from his lungs as Will pants and whines into their kiss.

He can feel Will's body already starting to cool, his pre-heat sated for now. The gold in his eyes, though still vibrant, has retracted enough to show the normal blue-green of his iris.

Will pulls back, ducks his head, and arches up under Hannibal to encourage the Alpha to cover him, both in a dormant instinct to shield himself from predators, but also to trap their warmth and strengthen the pair-bond that is initiated with a bite and knotting.

Will, it seems, cannot stop purring, and it only grows louder and more intense when Hannibal cages him in and flattens them out on the couch, resting his weight on Will's back and nuzzling his hair and the bite marks he left on Will's nape.

He will make a collar of bruises for Will to wear. After he shaves, of course.

Will sighs, still purring, and Hannibal laces their fingers together, pulling his arms tight to Will's sides so he can cover him there, too. "Thank you," Will whispers, after another quiet moment. He sounds exhausted.

Hannibal hums and kisses his exposed shoulder.

"I suppose this changes things," Will adds after a moment.

Hannibal huffs. "Only in that we are acknowledging what was already hinted at," he replies. He feels Will's hum of acceptance. "These are conversations we can have later, when your head is clear."

"I feel clear," Will replies. "Clearer than I have...in months."

Hannibal knows Will feels the purr he lets out at that. Will squeezes his fingers and goes lax underneath him.

"How long...?"

"Typically, ten minutes," Hannibal replies. Will hums. "Once we separate, we will eat some more. Then, I believe, we should move to a bed."

Will's cheek bulges with a smile. "Yes," he says. "I think that would be best."

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

guys I'm so fuckin tired it's 1am and these boys fought me all damn night.
buuuuuuuuuuuuuut I think you'll like it.....

Hannibal feeds Will more casserole, setting a bowl piled high with the steaming heap of meat and potatoes and cheese. Beside it is plate of sliced pineapple rings from what remains of their breakfast. He gives Will a large glass of water and then a smaller glass of apple juice – similarly enhanced, like Will's wine and his coffee syrup.

Will looks at the food in front of him, and then raises his eyes and offers Hannibal a soft, affectionate smile. "Thank you," he says, and Hannibal returns the smile, a quiet purr stuck in his throat, and brings his own plate around and sits next to Will as they start to eat.

He takes his fork delicately, spearing a piece of pineapple and wrapping his lips around it, pulling it slowly off the tines. He chews once and swallows it, immediately piercing another chunk. Hannibal watches him eat, unable to tear his eyes away from the way Will's throat moves when he chews and swallows, the flex of his tendon in the middle of Hannibal's teeth marks.

Will's eyes slide to him, less gold than they were before, his need sated for now, and he smiles knowingly. "You need to keep your strength up, Doctor Lecter," he says. Hannibal senses that he will not call him by name unless desperation forces him to. Will knows how much Hannibal loves hearing Will calling for him, so he rations it out, gives it like treats for a dog he's training.

Hannibal smiles amicably, and turns his attention to his food.

Will continues to eat. When the bowl of pineapples is half-empty, he speaks again; "I find myself very comfortable under your care," he murmurs, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows and turns his head again. Will is staring at his bowl of steaming casserole, his lower lip caught between his teeth. "I feel...like there's an exception. I'm afraid of going into heat, *except* with you. I'm afraid of having nightmares, *except* for the fact that you're here with me."

All of this, Hannibal knows, is because he took such painstaking care to implement his scent, his pheromones, and his influence into Will's life. He has his hand at Will's nape, guiding his gaze. His voice has been in Will's ear, turning his attentions and molding his way of thinking. His scent has been burning Will's nose for weeks now.

He hums. "In the interest of honesty, I'll admit the same," he says, and Will raises his head to look at him. Their eyes meet, gold and red, blue-green and brown. Will bites his lower lip and Hannibal sees a small tremor in his shoulders. "The idea of sharing myself with someone was always a fleeting one. People become too boring, too loud, too brash." He pauses, and Will's eyes drop to his mouth, then slowly drag back up. "*Except.*"

Will smiles, bites his lower lip, and then he turns his attention back to his food. He picks up a piece of pineapple with his bare fingers, slides it into his mouth, sucks on the ends of them to clean them off. Hannibal's stomach clenches with something that isn't quite hunger.

They go back to eating, until the plates are clear. Will eats everything Hannibal put in front of him, washes it down with the apple juice, and then nurses his glass of water while Hannibal clears their plates and does the dishes.

He washes his hands and turns back around. Will is cradling the glass of water, holding it with both hands on the edge of the counter, his lips resting lightly against the edge.

He straightens up, smiles, and then looks to the window. "Do you think we could go outside again?" he asks. "For a little while?"

Hannibal wants to indulge him. In this stage of the courting process, it is less about impressing Will than it is about accommodating him. Will's instincts trust Hannibal enough, and are enamored enough with him to allow his body into heat, with Hannibal's help. Will knows he will be taken care of, he understands that Hannibal desires him enough to pursue him, and isolate him, that Hannibal will hunt for him and feed him and defend him should it come to that. Will knows that Hannibal is a superior Alpha because he survived Tobias, he works in wary synchronization with Jack, and Will's lizard brain has been sated by Hannibal's knot, cementing the idea that Hannibal is a worthy mate and sire for his offspring.

So, Hannibal has proven that he can protect and provide. Now, he must prove that he can nurture, and love, and treat Will gently. He must prove that he will be not just a good mate, but a good father as well.

Will licks his lips and whines softly, finishing his water, and Hannibal's decision is made.

"Yes," he says, and takes the glass and refills it, setting it in front of Will again. "But we must be sure not to wander too far. Your heat may resurface at any moment."

Will huffs a laugh, strained but sounding like he's trying not to be. "Right," he murmurs, and takes a long drink of the cool water. He sets it down with a gasp and turns his attention back to Hannibal. Hannibal nods and circles the counter to fetch their coats, and Will reaches out and touches his forearm. It's a brief touch, but enough to get Hannibal to stop and turn to regard him.

"Thank you, Hannibal," he whispers, and Hannibal realizes that Will is trying to placate him, the same way Hannibal might touch his sensitive pressure points and invoke a feeling of calm. Omegas, until they get their Voice, must rely on whines and soft touches and any other form of manipulation they can to save their necks. Until Will bites Hannibal back, Will is at his most delicate point. He has never been more vulnerable to Hannibal's influence or more in

danger of Hannibal's affection turning to abuse, and so he must whine, and purr, and touch his Alpha as much as he can, call Hannibal by name because he knows that's what Hannibal wants, and appease him in any way he is able, until he gets his teeth in Hannibal's neck in turn.

This realization hits Hannibal suddenly, and melts away just as fast. Will's fingers curl around his wrist and he bites his lower lip, sets his water glass down, and stands. Before coming to the kitchen, he'd redressed in his shirt and jeans, and his clothes stink of his sweat, of *Hannibal's* sweat, and of their mating.

Will pushes himself close to Hannibal and rubs his nose under Hannibal's jaw. His exhale is soft and causes Hannibal to shiver, a low rumble caught in his chest that is soft and unbidden. He feels Will smile, though whether it is because he is aware of his manipulation, and pleased by it, or because he is simply happy that Hannibal is appeased, Hannibal could not say for sure one way or the other.

Will's fingers tighten around Hannibal's wrist and Will runs his nose under Hannibal's jaw again, lifts his head to touch their cheeks together, and then Hannibal ducks his head and Will's forehead touches his, and Will closes his eyes and kisses him. It's as soft and chaste as their first one, as passionate as their last, and Hannibal's eyes prickle behind his eyelids.

Then, he pulls away, and lets Hannibal's wrist go. Hannibal's skin feels overly tender, burned where Will touched him. He swallows harshly and gets their coats while Will goes to his nest to retrieve their shoes and socks.

Once they are suitably dressed, they brave the chilly air once more. The window-wall in the living room opens onto a small patio area, which has a waist-height wall and it separates the cliffside and the patio area, allowing people a place to perch or gaze out onto the ocean. Where the wall ends, a path begins that leads down to a small beach at the bottom of the cliff. It is treacherous and Hannibal knows Will is in no condition to brave it right now, but he imagines he will take Will down there one day. Perhaps once their children are old enough.

Will sighs, his eyes closing as he sits on one of the three iron patio chairs surrounding a clear table, off to one side of the patio, which is under enough shrubbery to protect guests from the brunt of the ocean wind, but still allow for the view. He curls up, puts his heels against the edge of the seat, and turns so that his thigh is braced against the armrest and he can rest his elbows there, to keep his head up and allow him to put the wind on his face.

Hannibal sits next to him, content to enjoy the view – both that of the ocean, and his lovely companion – until Will is too drunk on his heat to remain outside.

After a moment, Will heaves a sigh through his nose. His eyes are still closed. He looks the picture of leisurely beauty, his hair tousled playfully by the wind, the salt air staining his cheeks pink, and Hannibal knows when he opens his eyes, the blue of the ocean will be reflected in them where they are not overrun by gold.

"I never saw the ocean until I moved to Virginia," Will murmurs, almost too quietly to hear over the rush of the waves, but Hannibal is so attuned to him he thinks Will's heart might beat

once, a little off-rhythm, and he would feel it. "You'd think I would, since my dad built and repaired boat engines, but no. Not once."

"Do you like it here?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods, and opens his eyes to stare out. It is not an overly nice day; the clouds are heavy and grey, promising rain, and the ocean is dull in response to the lack of sunlight. The waves crest white and foamy, but they do not sparkle and glow like Hannibal knows they can.

"I like the water," Will replies. "It's so..."

Hannibal waits. He expects words like 'calming', 'soothing', or even 'cold' or 'large'.

"...Contradictory."

Hannibal blinks, and cocks his head to one side. "You live a life of contradictions," he says, and Will hums and tilts his head so that he can regard Hannibal out of the corner of his eye. "You are Omega, yet you actively put yourself in danger. You stop Death, yet shake his hand at every crime scene. You fight instincts given to you to survive and yet embrace them when they overpower you."

"And you are Alpha, but you are a healer," Will replies.

"Merely to correct an imbalance in the universe," Hannibal says.

Will lets out a curious sound, turning his head and going lax, his cheek resting against his folded arms, which are resting on his knees. He frowns.

Hannibal clears his throat and looks out to the ocean. "Lives have been lost under my care," he says.

"You cannot help if a patient simply cannot be saved."

Hannibal nods. "I am aware."

Will regards him for another long, long moment. Hannibal cannot meet his gaze.

Then, Will unfolds, and gets up from his chair, and sits in the third one, which is placed much closer to Hannibal and is tucked right between the table and the wall. Hannibal tears his gaze away from the ocean when he feels Will's hand settle over what remains of the bruises on his knuckles.

"Who?" he asks, whisper-quiet.

Hannibal takes in a slow breath. He closes his eyes, and settles his other hand over the back of Will's. Will's fingers curl in his grip and when Hannibal looks at him, he can see a deep sadness on Will's face. Empathy is not sympathy, Hannibal knows that, but he wonders if perhaps his scent has turned bitter with sorrow and Will can smell it, or sense it somehow.

He sighs and squeezes Will's hand. "I had a sister," he says, "and I lost her." Will's fingers tremble, he turns his palm up to cradle Hannibal's fingers, and slides closer on the seat until his knee touches Hannibal's thigh. "I have always considered it my greatest failing. As an Alpha, and as a man."

Will lets out a soft, pained noise. His other hand settles across his stomach like Hannibal's loss is a knife-wound to his gut. Will takes his hand from Hannibal's and lifts it to his face, gently brushes his jaw. He doesn't say that he's sorry, and Hannibal is grateful. It is not Will's fault that Mischa died and it's not his responsibility to bear the weight of Hannibal's grief. Hannibal honors his sister with every feast, every meal he serves, every organ he harvests. He will plant a monument to her within Will, build a shrine to her within his heart and his house, and sacrifice Will at the altar if he must.

Will presses his lips together and looks down. His fingers pull away and rest back on Hannibal's forearm. Then, he offers a short, uncomfortable laugh, and sits back.

"If I lost someone like that," he begins, one hand still resting over his stomach, "I think I'd rip everyone I knew to shreds and set fire to them while they screamed."

Hannibal smiles. His eyes drop to Will's hand on his stomach, and he wonders what might happen should Will's children ever come under threat. He knows Will is capable of killing, he has the mindset of a mother already, adopts dogs like babies and reacts to threats against Abigail Hobbs like they are threats to himself.

"I think that Death will leave your children alone for a long while, out of self-preservation," he says.

Will huffs a small laugh and shakes his head. "Like you said, I shake hands with him every day," he replies. His eyes flash, and he sits up, and he seems much more focused, the sadness melting from him as he hops to the next lily pad of conversation; "Have you ever given thought to having children?"

"Not until recently," Hannibal replies.

Will blinks at him, and his cheeks turn a darker pink. He looks down and laces his fingers together. "And now?"

"I think this is another exception," Hannibal says. "I have never been willing to accommodate others within my life. It is a strict, regimented life I lead, and I enjoy that. But...I enjoy the chaos you have brought me as well."

"Another contradiction," Will says, smiling.

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Let us speak plainly to each other, then."

"Were we not doing that all along?" Hannibal asks.

Will huffs. "Maybe, but promising to speak plainly and then asking the right questions, dodging the right topics of conversation – you and I, I think, do that very well. God knows I don't like talking about certain things. But they are things that need discussing."

"You are starting to make me nervous," Hannibal says, teasingly, and Will rolls his eyes and rubs his hand over his mouth.

"Fine," he mutters. He looks down, spreads his hands out over his thighs, and heaves a breath like he's gearing up to be punched. He raises his eyes again and meets Hannibal's and he's calm – not steady, with heat so close to his mind there's no way he can be – but he's focused.

"You want to mate with me," he says. Hannibal blinks, his eyes dropping to the bite on Will's neck, and fights back the urge to tell Will that he essentially already has. He nods, instead, and Will stalls for a moment, like he didn't expect Hannibal to admit it. As though, after Hannibal has taken such deliberate and careful steps to this moment, he might still deny it and change his mind at the last minute.

His sweet, unsure thing. Hannibal wants to reach for him and kiss the frown from his brow, swallow his placative whines and let him show Hannibal just how desperately he needs Hannibal to love him.

Will sucks in a breath and bites his lower lip. "How long have you wanted that?"

Hannibal hums, turns his eyes away, only to snap them back when Will growls. "Look at me when you answer," Will demands. Hannibal can see more of the gold showing in his eyes – perhaps Will is frantic, aware that he doesn't have a lot of time. Maybe the heat is making him bolder, meaner. Either way, Hannibal likes the acid on his tongue, the sharpness of his bared teeth.

Hannibal meets his gaze. "The first time I thought about it was when Jack called us into his office regarding the Shrike," he says. Will blinks, sitting back like Hannibal's words are physical pushes against his chest.

He frowns. "That was...the first time we met," he says weakly.

"Yes," Hannibal replies. He shrugs and leans back in his chair, allowing Will the space he needs to cope with that news. "I felt attraction to you immediately – purely physical, at first – and then you spoke. You challenged me, and I felt your anger, felt a...fire in you, I suppose I'd call it. I was intrigued. But, our first meeting did not go well. And I did not think we would be compatible as friends, let alone lovers, or mates."

"But that changed," Will replies. Hannibal nods. "When?"

"Before I answer, I'd like to know why the timeline means so much to you, Will."

Will swallows harshly. His lips part and his fingers curl against his thighs, into fists. He taps his knuckles against one thigh, a set of ten, *taptaptap*. Hannibal looks down at Will's hand. He hasn't done that since they came up here. He wonders if it's a trigger of mentioning the Shrike, or something else entirely.

"I'll tell you," Will says, strained. "But you must answer my question first."

"Why is that?"

"I'll cite precedence. I asked first."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side. He forces his tongue behind his teeth and resists the urge to bare them at Will, to cow him into submission. He could do it, easily – he could put a hand on Will's nape and force him to his knees. He could draw upon his Voice to silence Will or draw out his confession in turn. Usually after a bite, after an Omega's blood is shed, the growth on the Alpha's vocal cords becomes engorged and allows the right kind of pressure on them to give the Voice. Usually symptoms include sore throats and hoarse voices, or even loss of voice, for a few hours. Hannibal has felt none of those, but when he growls he can feel the potential there.

But Will speaks; "Hannibal," he whispers, and sits forward again, his eyes wide and pleading when he touches Hannibal's thigh gently. "No matter what, you have power over me. We both know that. I cannot run from you, I can't fight you. Please, allow me the freedom of conversation. I just want to know."

It's another placative gesture. Hannibal knows it. But just as before, knowing what Will is doing doesn't mean Hannibal is able to resist him any more than he would otherwise.

He sighs, and looks away from Will's beautiful golden eyes. "When you went into rut," he admits, and Will presses his lips together. "You said I see potential in you and you were right, and I told you I always have, and I wasn't lying." He looks back at Will. "I have always seen potential in you. And when you were in rut, I saw that potential realized. I saw someone I could share my vision of the world with."

Will is silent, unmoving. His eyes hold Hannibal's gaze, and then he bites his lower lip and nods. Once, slowly. It looks like some great weight is set upon his shoulders. He almost collapses with it, and Hannibal takes a deep breath in when the wind changes and brings with it the heavy, sweet scent of Will's heat. It is like Will had been desperately trying to resist succumbing to it for the purposes of their conversation, but now that he's satisfied, he cannot be strong for a second longer.

Will's fingers curl in Hannibal's clothes and he whimpers, clenching his eyes tightly shut.

Hannibal stands, compelled to rise and go to his mate at the sound of Will's desperate whimper, and he pulls Will to his feet by his hair. Will gasps, sagging against him, and Hannibal cups the back of his flushed neck and kisses him deeply.

Will moans, nails digging into Hannibal's coat sleeves where they stretch around his biceps, and Hannibal growls and bites down on Will's lower lip, hard enough to know it hurts. It is punishment, he tells himself; a warning to Will's sharp mouth and clever tongue that every verbal bout is a victory Hannibal concedes to him. Even if that is not true, he will have Will believe it.

Will flinches, breathing hard, and when he pulls back and opens his eyes, they're wholly gold. "Please," he says, and his lower lip is red from where Hannibal's teeth pierced his chapped flesh. Hannibal growls again, unable to help the sound, and tugs Will close to him.

"I want you to run," he says, and Will blinks, slowly. He bites his lower lip, winces at the pain, and hums. "You will run to my bedroom, and I will chase you. I will give you a small head start."

Will smiles. "Ten seconds?"

"Three."

"Five?" Will counters, and rubs his hands down Hannibal's arms and touches his chest, letting out a soft purr for good measure. Hannibal smiles and kisses him.

"Five," he says against Will's mouth.

Will pulls away with another smile, gentle and affectionate. He takes a step back, like he's testing to see if Hannibal will actually allow him his head start. Hannibal cocks his head to one side and smiles.

"Better hurry, dear one," he says, and lets the words color with just a *hint* of the Alpha Voice. He sees it hit Will immediately. His shoulders tense up and he has to catch himself on the table to keep himself upright. "I've already started counting."

Will swallows harshly, and shoves himself away from the table and towards the entrance to the cabin. He stumbles once he reaches the inside, the heat filling his lungs and rendering him momentarily static.

Then, he turns, and looks at Hannibal again. Hannibal smiles, and starts to walk into the cabin after him.

Will shrinks back, whining in supplication. Hannibal closes and locks the door and Will stumbles again, his hands braced on the couch. He smells incredibly sweet, even through his clothes, and warm like spiced rum.

Will makes it to the stairs and he's breathing heavily, forcing himself up them at a semi-crawl. He keeps his eyes on Hannibal as Hannibal takes off his shoes, his socks, and his coat, placing them by the couch. He rolls his sleeves up to his elbows again and takes off his belt, holding it loosely in his hand.

He looks up and Will trembles, sweat curling his hair and darkening the scruff on his jaw. Hannibal walks to the bottom of the stairs, and when he puts his hand on the bannister he hears Will heave a breath and try to run again.

Hannibal ascends the staircase slowly, and when he reaches the top, Will is pressed against his bedroom door, at a crouch, his back to the door, his shoulder tucked under the handle. He's panting, jaws parted, and looks up at Hannibal with something close to fear. Hannibal

would believe it's fear, but he can smell how ready and slick Will is, can see how Will's eyes rake over him like Hannibal is a fine feast for his indulgence.

Hannibal smiles at him, and walks over to him, and wraps his free hand in Will's hair again, hauling him to his feet. Will scrambles upright, nails clawing at the door, shoulders braced against it so hard the wood creaks.

Hannibal kisses him and Will moans, roughly, full of need.

"Hannibal," he whispers, digging his nails into Hannibal's shoulders. "Hannibal, I -. Wait."

Hannibal pulls back. His hand is still in Will's hair and he waits to snarl at his Omega. How *dare* Will demand he wait, that he stop, smelling like he does and when Hannibal is so close to staking his rightful claim over this prey he fought so hard to catch?

He doesn't say anything like that, and swallows back the anger from his lizard brain. "What's wrong?" he asks, and hopes his voice comes out concerned and not impatient.

Will swallows harshly. His neck is soaked in sweat, staining the collar of his shirt and making his scent musky and sharp. Hannibal wants to lick him clean. He's thoroughly entrenched in heat now, and nothing will pull him out of it, except a child in his belly, or time.

"I -." Will's hands turn gentle, press on Hannibal's chest. Hannibal growls, his fingers twitching in Will's hair. "I need to say something. Now. While I can still think."

"Yes?" Hannibal replies, and this time it is a snarl.

Will's eyes lift, meet Hannibal's, lower to his mouth and rise back up.

"Will," Hannibal says when he remains silent; "I want to listen, but I think it's fair to say that neither of us are capable of much patience right now."

Will swallows. "I won't betray you," he whispers, and slides his hands up to cup Hannibal's jaw. Hannibal blinks, and frowns, and tries to pull back but Will follows him, whines, presses his lip to Hannibal's chin, his jaw, the corner of his mouth. Their noses brush and Hannibal can't resist falling against Will, pinning him to the door. He drops his belt and wraps both arms tightly around Will, drawn into his kiss and sinking against him like quicksand.

When they part, Will is gasping, he looks drugged off his heat, and Hannibal can feel the warmth of his body through their clothes like Will is trying to burn him. "I'm yours," Will says, slurring. "Everything I am belongs to you."

The words cause a flicker of recognition in Hannibal.

This is my design.

"Is that what you want?" he asks, because suddenly this has become *very* important. The murder of Mister Wallace, the Omega that Hannibal killed and cut but did not destroy, those are the words Will blessed his offering with. He remembers them, clear as day.

Will shivers, heavy-lidded, burning with gold. He smiles, and does not answer. Hannibal doesn't even know if he can.

He kisses Will, steals his breath and claims his mouth, and opens the door to his bedroom, ushering Will inside.

Chapter 13

Hannibal knows what Will meant, when he found likeness in the contradiction of water. Will is bold, crashing against cliffsides and presents an overwhelming chasm of darkness, chaos, and disorder. He is a great expanse for Hannibal to explore and conquer, and no matter how harshly his seas rage, no matter how he bucks and writhes and tries to drag Hannibal under, Hannibal sails him easily, navigates Will's currents and flows as well as any seafarer.

But he is also gentle, and sweet. He provides nourishment and satiation for Hannibal's dry mouth. He leaps up like a happy stream into Hannibal's touches, wraps around him as easily as water does in a river when Hannibal wades deeply into him.

And he can also be cold, icy. He has the power in him to sink great ships, to drag lesser men down to the bedrock. He can claw through steel, bite iron, snarl at anyone who dares to come to him unprepared and unknowing.

He is a serpent of the sea, a pagan God of the ocean, and he is Hannibal's.

Hannibal takes Will by the neck and holds him still as he closes and locks his bedroom door. Will's eyes are heavy, burning with gold, hardly able to stay open. He throws himself against Hannibal's chest, dashes himself against the cliffside of Hannibal's body, and curls his fingers in Hannibal's clothes when Hannibal kisses him and sucks the sweet moan from Will's gasping mouth.

He guides Will to his bed and lets him go, and Will falls, sitting heavily on the edge of the mattress. Hannibal cups his jaw with both hands and puts pressure on his neck and Will gasps, his fingers curling around Hannibal's bare wrists. When he looks up at Hannibal, his face is a mask of adoration, as strong and desperate as a man might look upon the face of God.

Hannibal smiles and kisses his forehead. "Bare yourself for me," he says, whispering the words against Will's sweaty skin. Will nods, whining softly, and Hannibal lets him go.

He claws at his clothes, desperate to get them off of him. He's sweating in earnest now, his body temperature rising to ensure that his womb is as welcoming a host as it can be for Hannibal's seed. He pulls his shirt over his head and throws it to one side, revealing the flush on his chest and the slick shine of his sweat where it gathers in his collarbone and on his stomach.

Hannibal watches, gluttonous and red-eyed, as Will turns his shaking hands to his jeans. He struggles with the button for a second, biting his lower lip, his brow furrowed in concentration, and then he manages to get them undone and lays back, lifting his hips to slide them down and kick them off along with his underwear.

His thighs are caked with slick, shining in the light, interspersed with lines of where Hannibal's release leaked back out of him. Hannibal growls, swallowing harshly, his mouth watering at the sight. Will's cock sits heavy and red on his stomach, leaking there too.

Hannibal wants to dedicate an entire room in his home to pictures of Will just like this, exposed and desperate. He will treasure this sight in the years to come, mark how Will's belly swells and stretches with his children, note each new bite Hannibal places on Will's neck and map them like stars in a constellation.

Will heaves with a shaky breath, and Hannibal holds out a hand, fingers curled. "Will," he says, and Will's eyelids flutter and he sits up, putting his cheek in Hannibal's palm and allowing Hannibal to thread his fingers through his hair. He's damp here, wet as the rest of him, sweat making his hair flatten and curl around Hannibal's fingers.

Hannibal growls again and steps between Will's spread knees. Will lets out a soft moan and digs his fingers into Hannibal's hips, pulling him closer, and nuzzles the bulge of Hannibal's cock through his pants. He opens his mouth and wraps his lips against the line of Hannibal's cock with a loud sucking noise and Hannibal's jaw clenches, he forces his eyes to remain open so he can watch the whorish spread of Will's mouth on him, so desperate to get at his Alpha's scent and his cock that he doesn't even register that he can't, yet.

Hannibal wants to let him. Will whines, and he supposes it would be cruel to deny his mate any further.

He uses his free hand to unbutton and unzip himself, and pulls his cock out of his clothing. Will licks his lips, raises his eyes, and Hannibal meets his gaze and bites his lower lip when Will's jaws part and he plants an open-mouthed kiss on the side of Hannibal's cock. His hair hides his eyes and Hannibal's hand tightens on the back of his skull when Will angles his head to take the head of Hannibal's cock into his mouth with another desperate whimper.

Imprinting his scent into Will is an important part of the mating process. Hannibal wants to flood Will's mouth, stain him wherever Will allows. He wants to spill over Will's face, mark his shoulders and back, wants to rub his seed into Will's flushed chest and lick it from Will's thighs. He's sure it will taste divine when coupled with Will's slick.

Will's cheeks hollow, stained red, and he takes more of Hannibal's cock into his mouth, tugging on Hannibal's hips to encourage him to go deeper. Hannibal knows his scent is most potent here and Will seems ravenous for it.

He also knows Will can smell himself on Hannibal, taste his slick on Hannibal's cock. It will satisfy his mating urges, remind his lizard brain that this is *his* Alpha – this is the one who can soothe the fires of his heat, kiss his neck, bite and mark him because Will's body needs him to.

Will moans, sucking him down. He's too uncoordinated to do much, and Hannibal can sense his inexperience, but his heat is making him rabid and so he sinks his mouth down, swallowing Hannibal as best he can until Hannibal hits the back of his throat.

Will gags, and Hannibal growls, tightening his hand in Will's hair and forcing Will to keep him down. The spasm of Will's throat is wonderful, teasing at the tightness of his body, and Hannibal pulls back just a little when he feels reflexive tears well up in Will's eyes and spill onto his hand.

He tightens his grip in Will's hair and Will gasps, mouth going slack, and Hannibal pulls back. Saliva coats his cock, stains Will's lips, and Will looks up at him, red-mouthed and wanting. Hannibal cannot resist kissing him, licking his sore lips.

"Hannibal, *please*," Will gasps. He's too out of it to move, placated by the touch in his hair, and he shivers when Hannibal slides his hand down and cups Will's nape. The bite on Will's neck is warm, sore against his hand, and Will arches against him, clawing at Hannibal's hips in a desperate, base need to get Hannibal closer. "*Please*. Off. Let me see you."

Hannibal smiles, and rewards his Omega's desperation with a soft purr. "Lay back," he says, and lets Will go. Will gasps, but obeys, pushing himself up onto the bed and lying on his back, a passive and beautiful feast for Hannibal to consume.

Hannibal straightens. He undresses without ceremony, but slowly, admiring the way Will's chest heaves and his stomach clenches with desire at every fresh patch of skin Hannibal bares for him. Will's body calls for him, beckons him like a lighthouse on a shore, and Hannibal wants to sail over, across the churning water, and find harbor inside of him.

He slides his shirt from his shoulders and folds it, setting it on top of one of his dressers. Then, his suit pants follow, and his underwear, until he is as bare as Will is. Will's eyes rake over him, appreciative and ravenous, and he swallows hard enough that Hannibal hears his throat click.

Hannibal smiles and climbs onto the bed between his thighs, setting his heavy hands on Will's knees and sliding upward to encourage him to spread his legs and offer himself up to his Alpha. It would be easier for Will to take Hannibal's knot on his hands and knees – that is how his kind evolved to breed, how his instincts demand he present for his Alpha to encourage him to mount and mark him.

But Hannibal wants to see Will's eyes.

His hands meet Will's hips, slide up through the sweat on his skin, settle over his pounding heart. Will is trembling, no fear left in him now, replaced by the id-state that is an Omega in heat or an Alpha in rut. Hannibal thirsts for the day his own rut overcomes him and he can mount Will at his leisure, get Will slick with a touch to his neck and a single, low growl, have him shaking with need and ready for wherever Hannibal wants to take him.

He imagines slaughtering an Alpha and mounting Will next to his cooling corpse, and then feeding Will his flesh while Will grows round with his child.

Will's hands slide up his bare arms, curl under them and behind his shoulders, encouraging Hannibal to cover him and rest his weight against Will. Hannibal does, growling when his cock slides between Will's thighs, coated in his slick.

Will's scent is overpowering, etched deeply into Hannibal's lungs when Hannibal kisses him. Will arches up into it, nails dug into Hannibal's back and raking down as he lifts his hips with a plaintive whine, desperate to get Hannibal closer, *inside*.

Hannibal puts his hands on Will's hips, kisses Will's jaw, and then he opens his mouth wide and sinks his teeth into Will's shoulder as he forces his cock against Will's hole, growling when Will tenses, shudders, and allows him in.

Although Omegas get slick, and loosen somewhat in the hormonal release needed to become aroused, it is considered polite to stretch them out before attempting to mount them. But Will makes Hannibal feel rude, drives away all thoughts of decorum and civility when he's like this. Hannibal feels Will's body fight him, clenching up. He feels Will's growl against his mouth, but Will shifts his weight, raises his thighs to cradle Hannibal's hips, and doesn't tell him to stop, doesn't try to push him back.

Will needs Hannibal just as much as Hannibal must take him in return, and when Hannibal sinks in as deeply as he can go, Will gasps and trembles under him and tilts his head to one side, exposing his throat, and it feels like a 'Thank you'.

Hannibal snarls, no patience in him left, and tightens his nails in Will's flesh as he starts to move. He mounts Will with punishing, brutal force, drives him into the bed and forces out soft, desperate noises from Will's abused mouth. Will's cries are a mating call, he's howling for his mate, and Hannibal eagerly obliges him.

Hannibal is starting to sweat. Will's body is fever-warm under him and around him, and Hannibal growls when he licks over Will's red throat and tastes his sweat there, a fine aftertaste to the normal sweet-mint of his skin. Will turns his head and catches his mouth, kissing him fiercely, and Hannibal has to fight back the urge to knot when he feels Will's teeth sink into his lower lip.

It's a sharp pain, decadent. Will flinches back, like he hadn't realized what he'd done. His eyes are wide and gold and he whimpers, sliding gentle hands into Hannibal's hair.

"I'm sorry," he whispers.

Hannibal purrs, deep in his chest. He takes his hands from Will's hips and plants his elbows on either side of Will's head, forcing his Omega to curl up and fit in the space below his body. Will shivers and nuzzles under Hannibal's jaw, licks the stubble on his neck. He kisses Hannibal's sweaty skin and sets his teeth on Hannibal's jaw and Hannibal growls, shuddering.

He sinks in again and Will jerks, whining, his scent spiking as he clings to Hannibal. Hannibal snarls, burying his nose in Will's sweaty hair as he strikes Will's prostate again. The way Will tightens up around him and whimpers like he's in pain, like he's afraid of how well Hannibal fucks him, is depraved and beautiful. Hannibal could compose for a thousand years and never mind a melody so sweet.

"Don't be sorry, darling," he says, and is surprised at how difficult it is to form the words around his growl. "Never be ashamed of doing what you desire."

Will whines and Hannibal wraps his arms around Will's head, cutting off his sight lines and forcing him closer to Hannibal's neck. His fingers curl in Will's hair and tug, forcing his mouth open, and Will moans and licks Hannibal's throat, cleans the sweat from his collarbone, and digs his nails into Hannibal's back.

"Please," he whispers, his mouth close to Hannibal's ear. Hannibal shivers, thrusting in again, desperate to feel Will tighten and bear down around him and milk his cock. "Please, Alpha -. Hannibal. Please."

What a sweet thing he has between his teeth.

Hannibal rears back, slides his hands behind Will's knees to force him to curl up more. The angle allows Hannibal to touch his prostate with almost every thrust and he can see Will; his cheeks and chest a bloody, beautiful red; his mouth slack as he gasps and moans; the lovely gold in his eyes. Hannibal wants to tear his teeth through every inch of Will's flesh, suck deep marks into his chest and rip open his neck so that he can bite Will's spine. He wants to cripple Will with desire, abuse him with his love, break him from the inside out with his knot and his offspring.

Will's eyes flash and he reaches up, touching Hannibal's chest, fingernails catching in the hair there. He swallows, bites his lower lip, and then he tilts his head back and to the side, closes his eyes, and tenses up with a sharp cry.

His cock twitches, throbs, and Hannibal slows so that he can truly admire the stain of white as it mixes with the red on Will's chest. He lets go of one of Will's legs and slides his fingers through his release, coats his hand with it, and raises it to his lips.

The sweet food has affected his body here, too. Hannibal swallows what's on his fingers eagerly, then scoops up more and slides his fore- and middle finger between Will's teeth.

He hooks them in Will's mouth and covers Will again, planting Will's seed on his tongue and then sliding his hand from Will's mouth to his throat when he kisses Will and licks him clean. Will moans, trembling, his body spasming tightly around Hannibal's cock. With Hannibal covering him again, Will can claw at his back, leave marks of his own. He is so sweet, so eager under Hannibal, too desperate to be tamed and too ferocious to be conquered.

Hannibal snarls, bares his teeth against Will's lips, and thrusts in deeply. His knot swells, locking them together, and his nails bite into Will's neck and his thigh so suddenly and sharply that he feels Will's skin give for him.

He lets the blood bead on his fingertips and moves his hand away, licking the drops from Will's neck. Will is shaking like he's trying to keep sure ground in an earthquake, like he can feel the Earth splitting apart to swallow him but Hannibal is there, and covers Will, purring softly in his chest as he sinks as deep into Will as he can and feels his orgasm crash against him.

Water on the cliffside.

Will shudders, and Hannibal can smell his heat-scent cooling for now. He lets out a soft rumble, nuzzling Will's sweaty hair, and goes still when he feels Will gasp and rear up, and Will's teeth touch his neck.

He waits. If Will bites him back, it will cement the Alpha-Omega pair bond at the foundation. From that point, Will's affection for him will only grow, and his ability to resist Hannibal's

influence will be almost completely gone. It isn't anything as spiritual as psychic connection, but Will's already-incredible ability to assume and understand Hannibal's thoughts and point of view will only be amplified.

Will licks his lips, Hannibal can feel the tease of his tongue against his neck. Then, Will sighs, and nuzzles under his jaw.

Hannibal hums, willing to accept the loss. He is sure that Will, by the end of his heat, will have no choice but to bite and mark him back. If nothing else, then out of a sense of self-preservation. Will is vulnerable without his own Voice, and all-too-aware of how much Hannibal could hurt or abuse him.

He lets Will's other leg go and pets through his hair, and then Will growls, bares his teeth, and sinks them into the meat of Hannibal's chest, below his collarbone.

Hannibal snarls, his cock twitching inside of Will with another spurt of his seed as he feels Will's teeth part his flesh. He closes his eyes, the sensation of Will suckling at the blood from the bite overcoming him more powerfully than he expected. He feels Will's need, smells it and senses it in the way Will touches him.

Will licks over the bite mark, purring softly, and Hannibal pulls back.

Will's eyes are glowing gold, his teeth red. He licks his lips and cups Hannibal's cheek. Hannibal wants to ask why – traditionally mating bites are placed at the neck, as a mark of ownership and commitment, and are public for the sake of social navigation. Hannibal's bite is plain on Will's nape, but if Will doesn't bite Hannibal's neck back, the duality of their bond will be a secret.

Will smiles, and leans up for a kiss that makes Hannibal's gut clench. He's still purring, loud in the room, his manner sleepy and sated now. When his heat hits its peak, it will demand Will be knotted almost immediately after the last one, and he will not be able to sleep or eat unless Hannibal makes him.

Hannibal's chest burns, and he cradles Will's skull, and kisses him back.

When his knot goes down, he pets Will until Will purrs, exhausted and spent. He rolls Will onto his stomach and folds the blankets over him, allowing Will to burrow into his sheets. Then, he stands and leaves his bedroom and grabs his belt from the hallway.

He goes back to the bed and prowls over Will, a hand in his hair to keep him pliant. Will smiles, his eyes closed, and lets out a soft purr. It stops when Hannibal tugs on his hair to lift his head, and Will's eyes fly open when he feels Hannibal feed the loop of his belt under Will's neck.

"Shh, dear one," Hannibal whispers when he hears Will's plaintive whine, smells the sharp spike of fear. He lets go of Will's hair and tightens the belt until it's pressing against Will's skin. He can still swallow and move, but the pressure against his nape will mimic Hannibal's touch. "This will help you sleep."

The pressure on his neck forces Will to relax, and his eyelids droop when Hannibal crawls underneath the blankets and sheets and he rests his weight against Will's back. Being covered by an Alpha will soothe an Omega in distress, and if Hannibal is here to keep Will's nightmares at bay, it will strengthen Will's devotion to him and present him as a direct cure for his fear and anxiety.

Will clears his throat. With the growth of his Omega Voice, he will likely be hoarse and find it difficult to speak for a few hours. Will tilts his head and brushes his cheek against Hannibal, and Hannibal kisses his jaw, runs his nose up the fine line of Will's cheekbone and back into his hair.

"I'll take care of you," he whispers, and slides his hands down Will's arms and puts his nails against Will's wrists.

Will swallows, purring softly. "I trust you," he rasps, softly. Hannibal smiles and kisses his red mouth.

Hannibal mounts Will several times over the course of the day. They manage to eat somewhat, but Will's heat soon overwhelms him and what he does manage to eat is whatever sliced fruit and meat Hannibal can provide, and he feeds Will from his hand, kissing the sticky sweetness from his lips after every bite.

They mate until Hannibal's knot is sore and Will has a string of bruises down his chest and across his nape. Hannibal's claws leave marks in his back and thighs, his scent is so permanently entrenched in Will's skin that he doubts any shower would clean him of it. The thought makes him purr.

By the end of the first day, Hannibal's bedsheets are in ruins, stained with seed and slick and blood. Will bites Hannibal in turn, every time. He deepens and darkens the mating bite he put on Hannibal's chest until it's a sore, raw wound. It will likely leave a scar. Hannibal finds himself very pleased by the idea.

Will curls up against him and Hannibal threads the belt back around his neck, ensuring that whatever sleep he does manage will be dreamless and restful. Will rests his cheek on Hannibal's shoulder, an almost constant purr in his chest, and Hannibal is on his side with his arms wrapped around Will to shield and cover him.

Will's fingers trace lightly over the bite he left on Hannibal's chest, and he huffs a soft, tired laugh. Hannibal pulls back to see his face and Will is smiling, his eyes at half-mast, the ocean

quiet of storms for now. The black of the belt around his neck is a perfect counterpart to his flushed skin and the dark bruises Hannibal littered down his chest.

"I think, wherever we go, I'd like to be by the ocean," he murmurs.

Hannibal blinks, tilting his head to one side. He pets through Will's hair, cups his cheek, and Will's eyes lift to meet his. "Are we going somewhere?" he asks.

"Well," Will replies, "we can't stay here."

"'Here', as in...?"

"As in *here*," Will says. He licks his lips and flattens his hand over Hannibal's chest. "I told you, this changes things."

"Forgive me, Will, I'm at a loss as to what you mean."

Will smiles, indulgent. "The Ripper is here," he says. Hannibal presses his lips together, realizing too late that it would have been better not to react at all. "And while he's here, I have to catch him. I can't be yours and Jack's."

A half-truth. A confession? Hannibal doesn't know. Will's eyes, expressive though they are, give nothing away.

He swallows. "Florence is less than an hour away from several beaches by train," he says.

Will smiles. "Italy?" he asks, and Hannibal nods. He hums and curls up closer in Hannibal's arms, resting their foreheads together. His fingers drag from the bite on Hannibal's chest, to just under his jaw, and curl there gently. "I hear the food there is worth the trip alone."

"It is," Hannibal replies. "That city was my first great love."

"That's enough for me," Will replies, and kisses Hannibal deeply, his fingers curling in Hannibal's hair. "Our children will learn Italian, and play on the beaches, and we'll feast in Florence. And then Havana. And France, and Mexico."

He *has* to know. Hannibal kisses him again, sliding closer and tightening his arms around Will so that he can feel every line of heat coming from Will's body. "If that's what you want," he says, too stunned to give volume to the words.

Will smiles again, and starts to purr.

Chapter 14

Hannibal wakes to the sound of Will's desperate whine. He stirs, seeking the heat and sweetness of his mate, and opens his eyes to see Will, half-asleep, desperately clenching his fists in his pillow, his body rolling as he tries to fuck against the mattress. Hannibal is sure the only reason he hasn't managed to do anything more is because the belt is still so tight around his neck.

Will's heat affects him like starvation affects a man. There is nothing more in his mind than the need to sate his cravings. Hannibal watches, admiring the flush on Will's cheeks and down his neck, the way his shoulders are strong and tensed up. Will arches his body, rolls his hips, and stretches his arms out over his head as he moans.

Hannibal takes a deep breath in through his mouth, smelling Will as he shivers with his release. It won't be enough – without a knot and seed inside of him to cool the fires of his heat, Will's orgasm offers a paltry relief, enough clarity for a few moments for him to catch his breath and feel the ache that will come when he realizes he doesn't have an Alpha there to breed him properly.

But he does have an Alpha here, more than willing to tend to his needs.

Hannibal rolls onto his stomach and covers Will under the blankets, growling loud enough for the sound to register in Will's mind. Will moans, going still, and his eyelids flutter open, revealing his glowing, golden irises.

"*Hannibal*," he breathes, trembling under Hannibal's weight. Hannibal growls again, the sound caught in his throat like there's a belt around his neck too, and he nuzzles Will's sweaty hair and drags his cock through the slick on Will's thighs. Will whimpers, the sound heavy with Omega influence – more so than it was before. He's gained his Voice.

"Hush, my dear," Hannibal replies, and fits one of his hands against Will's heaving ribs, forcing him to be still as Hannibal rears back and lines his cock up against Will's hole. He's so slick and open that Hannibal knows he will be welcomed easily. "I'll take care of you. You're alright. I'm here."

Will moans, tensing up when Hannibal sinks into him. He's so wet, soaked to the bone in his and Hannibal's pheromones, it almost feels like entering a woman. But a woman would never taste so sweet and whine so nicely for Hannibal's knot.

He tightens his hand on Will's ribs and thrusts in, letting his weight settle heavily on Will's back. Will's fingers are white-knuckled in his pillow, he's unable to move because of the belt around his neck. Hannibal likes him like this. He thinks of how sweet Will would be when he's exhausted and lax from his heat, or when his pregnancy tires him. Hannibal will mount his Omega thoroughly, especially if Will is too tired to do more than lay there and take it, allowing Hannibal to use him for his own pleasure.

He growls, his free hand wrapping in Will's hair and forcing his head to one side. Will moans, exposing the side of his throat, and Hannibal bares his teeth against Will's jaw.

"Oh, *God*." It's a frantic, desperate cry, and Will sounds like he's in pain when he does it. He's incoherent with heat, high and withdrawing all at once. Hannibal purrs, unable to resist the urge to soothe him, and nuzzles Will's sweaty hair as he continues to move. Will is as gracious as ever with his body, his legs spreading to give Hannibal more room, his spine bending to lift and offer himself up to his Alpha's desires. "I – I can't, I -. *Hannibal* -."

"You can," Hannibal murmurs, snarling the words into Will's ear. "I'm here, Will. It's alright."

Will bares his teeth, a whine caught behind them. He bows his head and lifts his neck to Hannibal's mouth. His fingers flex, clench up again. He's trembling harshly, like he's going into shock. Hannibal growls and licks the sweat from his jaw and puts his lips by Will's ear.

"It's coming," he whispers, and Will lets out a needy, high-pitched sound of readiness. Hannibal bites his ear gently, mindful of harming him, and thrusts deeply into Will. The feeling of his knot coming is like an itch, something he knows only this Omega's body will satisfy in him. He ruts against Will's slick ass and his nails break skin, and Will shivers, his body clenching down in spasm as another orgasm washes over him. His skin is rich with his sweat, the dopamine flooding his brain makes him smell so sweet.

Hannibal shudders, and turns his teeth to Will's jaw as he feels his knot press tightly to Will's insides, and his orgasm rushes over him. Will moans, desperate and sated all at once, and his fingers finally loosen from the pillow. Hannibal bites his jaw hard enough to leave a mark.

Will sighs, opening his eyes, and lifts his head, begging for a kiss that Hannibal eagerly grants him. He pulls his hand from Will's flank and pushes his thumb against Will's mouth and Will sucks it down, cheeks hollowing as he does it.

He's cooling down, his belly full of Hannibal's seed, and he releases Hannibal thumb and whines again. It's another placative one, one that Hannibal feels deep in his chest, and his hand tightens in Will's hair with the urge to consume Will all over again.

"What is it?" Hannibal asks, nuzzling Will's cheekbone.

Will lets out a defeated noise. "It's too much," he says, and there's another whine under his words. Whatever he's about to say, he knows it will enrage Hannibal and he's trying to make himself as sweet and willing as he can to soothe his Alpha. "I can't do this for three more days."

If that. After such a long time on suppressants, Hannibal wouldn't be surprised if Will's heat lasted double what it used to when he was younger. Adding to that, Will is nearing the end of his most fertile years. His body is desperate for a baby, eager to rear young, and as a result his heats promise to be more intense and longer than they would be if he was still a teenager.

Will swallows harshly. "Will you let me take another Neutral shot?" he asks, quiet and low. "Just...just one. I feel like my brain is turning into soup."

Hannibal has to fight *very* hard to keep himself growling. "I'm not sure you're at a stage where it would be effective," he replies, instead of anything else. He wants to tear at Will's neck and use his Voice to force him into submission. He wants to snarl at Will and chain him to the bed for daring to ask for such a thing. His body and his heat are Hannibal's by right, and it is his duty to allow his Alpha to use him for however long and however harshly Hannibal sees fit.

Will bites his lower lip and offers up his neck, his jaw tilted up against his pillow to bare as much of it as he can. He can likely smell Hannibal's outrage, feel his anger, and he's doing whatever he can to appease Hannibal. He whimpers. Begging for mercy.

Hannibal sighs, and kisses Will's cheek as gently as he can manage. He doubts the Neutral shots will give him any relief beyond a few hours, and this is another opportunity to earn Will's trust and present himself as a reasonable, caring mate. If Will does know Hannibal's true nature, he has every right to be afraid, and the more Hannibal treats him kindly, the more willing he will be to see Hannibal's side, and follow him wherever he leads.

"We can try," Hannibal finally says, and Will's breath leaves him in a relieved sob.

"Thank you," he replies, meek and adoring, and Hannibal lets out a soft purr to soothe him. He runs his hands down Will's flanks, measuring the beats of his heart and his unsteady breaths. Will's hips lift into his touch as though they aren't knotted, like Hannibal is still denying him his relief, and Hannibal purrs again and slides one hand under Will's stomach.

Will knows what he's thinking. He pulls his arms down, one of them folding to rest his head against, the other joining Hannibal's on his stomach, hand pressing flat over Hannibal's knuckles. "I'll give you an Alpha," he says, sweet and eager.

"I will treasure any children you give me," Hannibal replies. With an Alpha-Omega pair, any genetic result is possible. Omegas are the only ones that can birth other Omegas, and Hannibal would love to see children with Will's eyes, but the thought of rearing an Alpha in his own image makes him purr. And if he were to breed one with Will the first time, it would be proof of their genetic compatibility, proof that their bond will breed the best of their kind.

Will smiles, and answers Hannibal's purr with one of his own. With the belt still around his neck, he's sleepy and pliant, and he whimpers when Hannibal's knot deflates and Hannibal pulls out.

Hannibal coaxes him onto his back and wraps his knuckles with the end of the belt, and he tugs Will to his feet. Will goes, offering his mouth up for a passionate kiss. "Stay right here," Hannibal says, and Will nods, dazed and shaking.

Hannibal goes to his dresser and takes out a t-shirt and lounge pants, donning the clothes. Then, he leaves the room and goes to Will's nest. Out of it he takes a soft blue shirt and black sweatpants, fishing them from the piles that Will has created and molded into his nest.

He debates lingering, planting his scent here, but that would be impolite. If everything goes according to plan, Will, by the end of it, will have no desire to leave Hannibal's side. He will

seek Hannibal out for security, protection, and sanctuary, and will be incapable of being alone.

He returns to find Will just as he'd left him. He smiles and rewards his mate with a gentle kiss, and sets the clothes down.

Then, he kneels, and gently touches Will's left calf. Will lifts his foot, unsteady but holding, and Hannibal threads it through one leg of the sweatpants. Then, the other. He pulls them slowly up Will's thighs, savoring the heat coming off his skin and the slick scent of Hannibal's release between his legs. He lets them settle into place, low on his hips.

Will licks his lips, his eyes meeting Hannibal's for a brief moment. Then, he lowers them when Hannibal takes his shirt and pulls at the collar, looping it over Will's head and letting it sit around his throat. He coaxes Will's arms through the sleeves and pulls it down into place. The clothes are loose by design, and easily pushed to one side. Hannibal doesn't know when Will's need will overpower him again, and he must be ready to mount his Omega at a moment's notice.

He takes the belt in hand again and tugs Will against his chest. Will's eyes flash, his mouth goes slack, his hands raise slowly to catch himself and curl in Hannibal's shirt. He's pliant with heat, uncoordinated and malleable, just as Hannibal likes him.

Hannibal kisses him, fists his free hand in Will's hair, and tightens the belt until Will gasps and when he whines, the noise is pinched and strained.

"Come with me," Hannibal murmurs. Like Will has a choice.

Will presses his lips together and nods, following Hannibal out of the room.

Hannibal sets Will at the kitchen island, and goes back upstairs to grab the Neutral shots. He comes back down with them, as well as a second bag that he places by Will's trembling hands where they're resting on the counter.

Will looks up at him, tilting his head to nuzzle Hannibal's arm as Hannibal opens the bag of shots and takes one out. He's trying to placate Hannibal more, show his appreciation in soft touches and gentle whines. Hannibal smiles and lets him, enjoying the way Will's touch feels on the exposed skin of his arms, and the sweat on Will's forehead as it's absorbed by the fabric of his shirt.

Hannibal sets the shot down and steps into place behind Will, cupping his throat and the back of his neck and forcing him to bend over the counter. Will goes, his shoulders flexing and tight. Then, Hannibal gently unhooks the belt and slides it from Will's neck. There are indents there from the edges of it, and Hannibal leans down and kisses them gently.

Will shivers, another whine stuck in his throat.

Hannibal slides a hand into Will's hair, petting him gently enough to coax a purr out of him. He smiles and licks over the raw-looking bite mark on the nape of Will's neck, and thoroughly enjoys the sight of goose bumps breaking out down Will's arms.

"Will," he murmurs, and Will heaves in a breath and whimpers. "I want you to promise me that this will be the last time. No more shots. No more suppressants. I will not tolerate you poisoning your body with this, if you claim to be mine."

Will lifts his head – or tries to. Hannibal tenses his arm and forces Will to remain bent over. Hannibal presses up against his back, mimicking the pressure of being mounted. It will enforce his dominion over Will, encourage him to submit to Hannibal to save his neck.

Will gasps, and nods. "I swear," he says, slurring the words.

Hannibal smiles, and straightens, letting go of Will's hair. "Very well," he says, and takes the shot. He uncaps it and presses it against Will's bare arm. The plunger reacts immediately, injecting the drug into Will's bloodstream.

He takes the empty shot away and recaps it, then sets it to one side. While waiting for it to take effect – if it does – he goes to the kitchen sink and takes a bowl from the cabinet above it, and fills it with warm water. He takes it back, along with a hand towel, and sets it by the second bag next to Will.

"Now, you will do something for me," he says.

Will raises his head, groggy and weak, and looks at Hannibal in question.

Hannibal smiles at him, prompting a weak one in return, Will's lips twitching at the corners. Then he opens the second bag. Inside is a straight razor, a strop, a brush, and a small bottle of shaving cream.

Will's eyes drop to it, a flicker of understanding crossing his face. His smile widens. "Does my beard offend you?" he asks, low and amused.

"You use your hair to hide the most vulnerable parts of yourself," Hannibal says. "I thought, given the circumstances, we were past that."

"You don't need to keep testing me, Doctor Lecter," Will says softly. "You know that heats, and ruts, are the truest form of ourselves. There's no deception in them."

Hannibal smiles. "Implying that I think you are deceiving me?"

"Implying that you think there's something I'm trying to hide," Will counters. His gaze is sharpening, the Neutral having the unfortunately effective ability to clear his head and quicken his tongue. Hannibal hums, and removes the strop and a small block on which to hone the razor. He slides it back and forth along the block, sharpening the edge of it to a fine point.

"You pointed out before that you have a lot more to lose than I do from an ill-suited union," he says lightly. Will hums. "I ask that you try and look at it from my perspective, as you're so

accomplished at doing."

"I'm *accomplished* at looking through the eyes of serial killers," Will says.

Hannibal nods, once. "Then look at this through mine."

Will is silent for a moment, his eyes on Hannibal's hands as he sharpens the blade. Then, he takes the strop and holds one end out to Will, who takes it, and they pull it tight so that Hannibal can run the razor over it.

"I find myself thinking of Doctor Greystone," Will says after a moment. "I am given an opportunity to prove strength in my weakness, and you, vulnerability in your strength."

Hannibal smiles. "You are not weak, Will."

"But I am at a biological disadvantage, as medical journals, and Hollywood, and even you are so quick to remind me," Will replies. There's no acid on his tongue but his tone feels cold. Hannibal looks at him for a moment and Will meets his eyes steadily, before Hannibal turns his attention back to his work. "I could give you everything, and you could rip me to shreds."

"You believe this is a one-sided endeavor," Hannibal murmurs.

"No," Will says. "Like you said, I allowed you to become very attached before showing any affection back. It's a defense mechanism, and I don't think it's wrong to say that my breed is the best at it."

"When no one is there to defend you, you must defend yourself," Hannibal confirms with another nod. He slackens the strop and Will lets his end go. Hannibal sets the razor down on the cloth and opens the bottle of shaving cream. He dips the cloth in water from the bowl and sprays some cream onto it, then dips the brush in.

Hannibal steps behind Will and Will tilts his head up, his eyes half-closed as Hannibal begins to spread it along his face. Normally he would wet Will's face with a hot towel, to soften the hair, but the warmth of his skin and the sweat from his heat has done a fine job of that already.

"I think you want my face bare so you can mark it," Will says. "You want it obvious who owns me, when I will not give you the same courtesy."

Hannibal hums. "You're not wrong," he says, and brushes the cream over Will's jaw and down his neck.

"You won't ask me why?"

"You will volunteer that information, or you will not."

Will huffs a laugh. "Well, either way, I think you know the answer."

Hannibal steps back, done with covering Will's face. He cleans the brush in the bowl of water and sets it to one side. "Jack."

Will nods, and then goes still when Hannibal grabs the razor. He unfolds it, pleased at the way the blade gleams in the kitchen light. If Will feels any anxiety over having Hannibal hold such a weapon so close to his throat, he gives no indication.

He's trusting and still. Hannibal threads a hand through his hair and tilts his head to one side, and presses the razor against his cheek. He drags it down in one smooth stroke, stripping away the hair and cream from Will's skin. He wipes the blade on the cloth.

"Jack won't tell me things if he thinks I'm under your influence," Will says, only going silent when Hannibal presses the blade against his skin again. He drags it down Will's jaw, then passes over his cheek again. "If he doesn't tell me things, then we go into this blind."

"And what is it you're so worried we're getting into?" Hannibal asks.

Will smiles, before he schools his expression and allows Hannibal to erase another patch of hair from his face. Hannibal circles to his other cheek and repeats the process. "Don't be naïve, Doctor Lecter," he says.

"Once again, I'm at a loss as to what you mean."

"I *mean*," Will says, and reaches out and wraps his fingers around Hannibal's wrist. It's the hand holding the razor and Will's eyes meet his, burning and sharp, all-seeing. "Jack won't just let us go. He'll hunt us."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, and Will lets his wrist go and tilts his head back. Hannibal finishes with his cheek and jaw, and slides the blade down his chin, and over his upper lip. He wipes the blade clean and then puts a hand on Will's forehead, forcing his head back against Hannibal's chest, so Hannibal can shave his neck.

They proceed in silence. Hannibal doesn't speak, and Will doesn't move for fear of cutting his neck. When Hannibal is done, Will's face is entirely clean, pink in parts from where Hannibal touched his skin. He looks young and fine, a piece of art worthy of any gallery. Hannibal folds the cloth and wipes the damp, clean edge on his face to wipe away excess foam. He washes the razor in the bowl, swipes it over a dry patch in the cloth, and begins to put everything away.

Will watches him do it, his hands drumming gently on the counter. *Taptaptap*.

"You think I can't handle it," he says after a moment, quiet but cutting enough to draw Hannibal's attention. "The truth."

"And what truth would that be?" Hannibal asks. He pushes the shot and the bag away once everything is clear, and takes a seat on the second barstool.

Will presses his lips together, a flint-strike of frustration in his eye. Hannibal smiles. "You won't speak freely because you're afraid for your neck."

"I won't speak freely because you have not done the same to me," Will replies. "If we are equals, then I will accept nothing less."

"I consider you my equal," Hannibal says. "My perfect equal and opposite."

"You are intimidating by nature," Will murmurs. Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "And impressive. And I feel like we have been hunting each other for a very long time."

Hannibal smiles. "When two animals share land, they have the option of killing each other, or forming a partnership to their mutual benefit. But first, it is important to do one's due diligence. An ill-thought partnership is no better than -."

"An ill-suited union," Will finishes. He's smiling, faint and pleased. "Jack isn't willing to share land with you. But I am."

"I'm starting to realize that," Hannibal replies.

"You have given me sanctuary," Will continues, turning on the stool so that he can face Hannibal fully. "You have given me clarity. Like a fog has been lifted from my eyes. I look at you and I *see*." He reaches forward and cups Hannibal's cheek. "I see you, Hannibal. And what I see is beautiful."

Hannibal swallows, and Will smiles, and stands. He takes Hannibal by the hands and pulls him to his feet and into the living room. He kisses Hannibal, strong and needy, and Hannibal knows he isn't in heat, the Neutral had calmed the fire of his instincts for now. The fact that Will is coming to him out of something other than desperation strikes a nerve that Hannibal hadn't realized had been so tender.

He moans softly into the kiss and Will smiles, rewarding Hannibal with a purr of his own. He takes Hannibal's hand and puts it against his own throat, and steps back, forcing Hannibal to follow. He pushes at Hannibal's chest until Hannibal sits, and Will climbs into his lap, his hands in Hannibal's hair, and kisses him fiercely.

Will's hand slides down his chest and Hannibal tightens his grip on Will's throat. Will's eyes flash, golden but edged with blue, and he smiles and rests their foreheads together as his hand dips below the hem of Hannibal's lounge pants, wrapping around his cock and coaxing it free.

"I want to be your equal," he whispers, kissing the last word to Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal can smell his slick, his scent carved into Hannibal's skin and Hannibal's scent mixed with his in turn. Will lets go of Hannibal's cock and reaches behind himself to push his sweatpants down. He kneels up, forcing Hannibal to rise to the kiss, and pushes his clothes down to his thighs so that Hannibal's cock can sink between his legs.

Will ends their kiss, biting his own lower lip. Their noses brush and Hannibal purrs at the feeling of Will's smooth jaw when it touches his. His hand goes tight around Will's neck again and Will gasps, his eyes unfocusing for a moment.

Then he takes Hannibal's cock and sits up, pressing it against his hole. His flesh parts for Hannibal and he lets go, digging his nails into Hannibal's shoulders as he sinks down. He is at his most brazen in this moment, his most powerful, and Hannibal feels helpless. His ship has capsized and is sinking into the current of Will's love.

He drags his nails down Will's neck, fists his hands in Will's shirt with a growl when Will kisses him, his body tight and welcoming around Hannibal's cock. Will gasps into the kiss, rolling his hips and pressing his chest tight to Hannibal's, like he's desperate for every snatch of warmth, every breath and moan he can coax from Hannibal's gut.

Will clenches his jaw, grits his teeth, and presses his forehead against Hannibal's neck as he starts to move in earnest, as eager as he is in the throes of his heat, but he's not in heat right now and he still touches Hannibal with all the desperate adoration of a sculptor molding his clay into his creation. He's shedding his skin, clawing his flesh and his veneer away and showing Hannibal the dark, cracked creature that sits behind his ribs.

Hannibal wants to devour him.

He takes his hand from Will's neck and cups his shaking thighs, helping him move on Hannibal's lap. He's sweating and refined, the most exquisite banquet Hannibal has ever created. A feast all for himself.

Will gasps when Hannibal's cock brushes along his prostate. He lifts his head, nuzzling Hannibal's neck, kissing his jaw, claiming his mouth. His hands fist in the back of the couch and he keeps moving, chasing the pleasure only Hannibal can offer him, curled up against Hannibal like a pup suckling at its mother's teat. He's thirsty, ravenous, and only Hannibal can satisfy him.

Hannibal growls, leans up, and sinks his teeth into Will's throat.

"Yes," Will gasps, clutching at Hannibal as he starts to bear down. He presses his cheek against Hannibal's temple, moves his hands to Hannibal's shoulders, grinds his cock against Hannibal's stomach until he starts to spill, hot and slick in Hannibal's hold. His blood flows into Hannibal's mouth and Hannibal drinks it down, sates his thirst with Will's blood, fills his gut with Will's flesh.

Will pulls back, pushes his forehead against Hannibal's, steals another kiss from his mouth. Hannibal growls, baring his teeth, his orgasm building behind his eyes. Will's nails claw at his exposed neck, run through his hair, like he wants to tear Hannibal apart in return.

"I'll make sure the whole world sees you," Will whispers, panting, sated. "Plant a seed in me, and I will flourish for you like Eden."

Hannibal purrs at the thought. Will's eyes are beautiful, meeting his gaze steadily. He sees Hannibal, Hannibal knows that now, and he's drawn to it like a moth to a flame. Hannibal wants to build an effigy to him, light it on fire like a beacon for the coming war.

Will smiles, and kisses him once more. "Hannibal," he moans, and it sounds like he's calling out for God. "Give me everything."

Hannibal closes his eyes, meets Will's parted lips for another deep kiss that feels like it will last for the next thousand years, and obeys.

Chapter 15

After they lay together, Will wants to sleep. His eyelids droop and not even Hannibal's desire to keep him close and lay marks to his exposed neck force him to make Will stay. His mate needs his rest, his body is forcing him to exhaustion so as not to jeopardize a potential pregnancy. Even though the chances of Will getting pregnant in his first heat since going off suppressants is small, it's a natural instinct and one Hannibal is ready to cultivate.

He leads Will up to his nest and fastens his belt around his neck again, cinching it tight. Will's eyes close when he does it, he moans and presses an open-mouthed kiss against Hannibal's neck and it feels like a reward for Hannibal for his efforts.

Hannibal smiles, and lets Will go, and goes back downstairs. As he approaches the kitchen, his phone rings from his coat, and he goes to answer it.

He stifles a soft growl. It's Jack. "Hello, Jack," he greets mildly, and sets about putting the bag of Neutral shots and the shaving kit away, his cheek and shoulder cradling his phone.

"How goes the war?" Jack asks, a thin amount of humor in his voice. He sounds tired, but also relaxed. The absence of the Ripper has cooled his aggression.

"Will shows a promising lead on his road to recovery," Hannibal replies. "Forgive me – I've been preoccupied the past few days. I owe you updates."

"I'm sure your preoccupation is well-founded," Jack says. Then, he clears his throat. "Am I right to assume that he's been receptive?"

Hannibal smiles. "Yes," he says, and offers nothing more. Jack doesn't need to know about the quiet conversations they share, the intimacy Hannibal has found with his lovely mate. Nor does Jack need to know that Will is very much Hannibal's now, and his leash has snapped and now hangs in tatters in Hannibal's hands.

"Good," Jack says. "I was worried."

"That he would resist me?" Hannibal asks.

"That he would resist everything," Jack replies. "He's stubborn, even more than his breed normally is."

Hannibal smiles again. That much he cannot deny. Then, Jack sighs, and he sounds much more tired again. "I'm afraid there's another reason I called you," he says. "There's been another Ripper murder."

Hannibal pauses, frowning down at the kitchen counter. "You're sure?" he asks, and his knuckles turn white as he braces himself against the kitchen island.

"Yes," Jack replies. "Or it's a very good copycat. I need Will back here."

Hannibal lifts his gaze to the ceiling and sighs. "I'm not sure that's possible, Jack," he says quietly. "Will is halfway through a very intense heat. I don't think he'd be much use to you right now."

Jack grunts. "I can come to you."

An unacceptable turn of events. Hannibal resists the urge to growl. He cannot, reasonably, deny Jack that. There is nothing that Jack deems more important than the capture of the Ripper. "Again, I must refuse," he says. "Will is in heat. The presence of another Alpha might drive him to do something...drastic."

"I'll send Alana, then," Jack says, and there's no room for argument. Hannibal presses his lips together and fights back a snarl. "Get him lucid enough to be useful."

"...I'll text you the address," Hannibal mutters, and then Jack hangs up on him. Hannibal resists the urge to throw his phone across the kitchen and watch it shatter into pieces.

He texts Jack the address to his cabin and sets the phone down lest he crack the poor thing in half from the force of his grip.

Unacceptable. How dare Jack assume to impose himself in the middle of Hannibal's designs – and when Will is proving to be so receptive and eager to him as well. Alana coming here could mean everything comes crashing down. If Will is unable to be 'useful', Hannibal will have to give him another Neutral shot. Or, worse, force his mate to ride out his heat unsatisfied, and that threatens to crack the bond between them.

He takes a deep breath, forcing his thoughts to calm so that he can achieve clarity. It's approximately a four hour drive to his cabin from Baltimore. Even if Alana were to leave right this second, Hannibal still has time.

He goes up to Will's nest and knocks on the door.

"Will?" he calls gently, not wanting to wake him if he is asleep. "Will, darling, are you awake?"

A second of silence. Then; "I'm awake. Come in."

Hannibal opens the door and sees Will kneeling in front of his suitcase. He has the open bottle of his suppressants in his hand. They're poured out and scattered on the floor between his knees. In the other hand are aspirin pills, the only bottle sitting on the floor.

Hannibal pauses, and Will looks up at him. "They're the same," he says.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "They look similar," he replies.

"No," Will says, and shakes his head. He bares his teeth in a brief snarl and looks back down at the pile of pills. His fists clench. "No, not *similar*. They're the same. Why are they the same, Hannibal?"

Hannibal presses his lips together and, when Will looks up at him, he sighs. "Because I replaced your suppressants with aspirin."

Will blinks at him, again, like he'd not been expecting Hannibal to be honest with him. "You...replaced them," he repeats, and looks down at Hannibal's feet. "You *replaced* them. So...when I asked you if I could still go into heat on my suppressants..."

"I didn't lie," Hannibal says. "The situation you posed to me was possible."

"But not *probable*," Will hisses. He stands and drops the pills and bottle, whirling on Hannibal with a snarl. The gold in his eyes is brilliant and bright with his outrage. "*You* did this. I went into heat because of you!"

"You went into heat because you knew as well as I did that it was the only way for you to see," Hannibal replies calmly. Will won't run from him, he's sure of that. They might fight, but Hannibal has prepared for that, too.

He steps into the room and closes the door behind him, approaching Will. Will is shaking, his fingers curling tight. He grits his teeth and growls when Hannibal takes his hands but he doesn't flinch away and doesn't try to run.

"Have I harmed you, Will?" Hannibal asks. Will sucks in a shaky breath through his jaws. "Have I done anything or said anything that made you feel afraid?"

"I was so *blind*," Will says, choking on the word.

Hannibal lets go of one of his hands and takes him by the hair, pulling them close together. Despite his anger, Will falls against him, the belt around his neck keeping him pliant and sweet in Hannibal's arms. Hannibal, after a moment, undoes the belt from around his neck and lets it fall.

Will gasps, his eyes wide when he raises them to meet Hannibal's gaze, surprised that Hannibal has given him his freedom. He licks his lips and ducks his gaze again. "Alana is coming," Hannibal says, and Will looks up again. "There's been another murder. A Ripper copycat. Jack wants you to analyze the case file."

Will frowns, and Hannibal smiles as he watches Will try and keep track of the conversation for once. "If you want to go with her, I won't stop you," Hannibal adds, petting through Will's hair until Will's eyelids flutter. "But I'm asking you to stay with me. Trust me, as you have so easily before."

Will licks his lips, and sighs, resting his forehead against Hannibal's jaw. "Where else would I go?" he whispers, and he sounds defeated and raw. "You have marked me. My scent is in your nose, my blood in your mouth. You'd find me wherever I ran."

He's not wrong.

Will pulls back after a moment, heaving a breath, and takes Hannibal's hands. "Come with me."

"Where are we going?"

"We're going to play Chess again," Will says, and looks over his shoulder as if daring Hannibal to argue. "With different rules, this time."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, but allows Will to lead him down to the living room. There is a stain of sweat and seed on the couch and Will makes Hannibal sit on it, before he kneels down to retrieve the chessboard and pieces.

"What are the rules?" Hannibal asks.

Will pauses, looking up at him. "You have exposed me," he says tightly. "Left me as open as a cadaver on a mortician's table. Now it's my turn."

Hannibal hums, sitting forward.

"When you take a piece, you will tell me something about yourself," Will says, setting all the pieces in place and then taking his own seat opposite Hannibal.

Hannibal nods. "And if you take a piece?" he asks.

Will hesitates, biting his lower lip. His fingers curl in the material of his sweatpants and his knuckles turn white. "And if I take a piece, I will ask you a question, and you will answer me honestly. You will not lie, or dance around the truth. If I think you are, I will leave with Alana and I will never come back."

Hannibal presses his lips together and debates refusing, but it is just as unacceptable to him to lose Will now as it would be for Jack to ferry him away. Hannibal will *not* let go of Will, even if Will is the one trying to leave.

He sighs. "Very well," he says, and gestures for Will to go first.

Will nods, and rubs his fingers over his bare throat. He leans forward and moves his King-side pawn forward one space.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow, and pushes the pawn shielding his Knight on the Queen's side forward two spaces. Will smiles. "Feeling aggressive, Doctor Lecter?" he asks, and moves the Knight out from his Queen's side to stand in front of the castle.

"I want to be open with you, Will," Hannibal replies, putting another pawn forward two spaces – the one in front of his King-side castle. "I betrayed your trust, and after you were so brave to give it to me. I want to make it better."

"You want to take care of me," Will murmurs, and moves his Knight forward again, curling to the side of Hannibal's pawn.

"Yes," Hannibal replies plainly. He moves his Bishop to the center of the field.

Will moves his Queen out and takes it. He looks up and meets Hannibal's eyes. "What was your sister's name?" he asks.

Hannibal blinks. He hadn't expected that question. "Mischa," he replies hoarsely.

Will nods, biting his lower lip. "That is what we shall name our first daughter," he says, and Hannibal swallows loudly, looking back down at the board. Such a simple declaration – and yet, it means a future. It means forever, and a chance for Hannibal to right the wrong that had been done to him so long ago.

He takes one of Will's pawns with his own, next. Will looks at him expectantly. Hannibal sighs. "I didn't stop being a surgeon out of a sense of loss, or inadequacy," he says. "I stopped because there was no accountability. I want people to know who was responsible for my crimes."

Will tilts his head to one side, and he nods.

The next time a piece is taken, it is one of Hannibal's castles. Hannibal can't help noting that Will is a lot better of a player when Hannibal isn't placating him and setting his mind aflame. "Were you ever going to tell me about switching my suppressants?" he asks.

Hannibal smiles. This is more like the kind of question he was expecting. "No," he replies honestly. "Probably not."

Will regards him, presses his lips together, and sighs through his nose. "I would have forgiven you," he says.

Hannibal nods, swallowing, and they exchange another loss of pawns. "Why did you allow me my Voice?" Will asks. "You could have taken that from me."

"Why would I do that?"

"Don't avoid the question. You know what will happen if you do."

Hannibal sighs, and nods, looking down at the chessboard as he considers his answer. Will waits for him with thinly-veiled impatience. "I don't want a puppet, Will," he says, and lifts his eyes. "Or a plaything in a mate. I would not settle for such a thing. If I had, I would have been mated long ago, to some woman or Omega with a pretty smile and a head full of air."

Will smiles. "Instead, you choose me. A man with a head full of blood and viscera."

"I find it much better suited to my tastes."

Will's Bishop falls next, and Hannibal tells him how he learned to sketch from the art galleries in Italy, and in Washington D.C. Then, one of Hannibal's pawns. Will sighs. "Alana coming here has you outraged. Why?"

Hannibal smiles. "It is not obvious?" he asks.

"Don't dance, Doctor Lecter," Will snaps. Then, he sighs again, his anger melting from him. "I won't let you harm her. She has been a good friend to me."

"To both of us," Hannibal replies, as he makes his next move. "Do you think I would hurt her?"

"I don't know what you'd do," Will murmurs. "To me, or to her."

"You think I am being unreasonable," Hannibal says. "Letting in a foreign party while you're in heat could be damaging, Will. Especially if Jack had ignored my request and come instead. He still might. How would you react to a foreign Alpha in your nest, in your home?"

Will's upper lip twitches. He bites his lower one and shakes his head. "I'd kill him," he replies flatly, and counters Hannibal's Check by moving his King out of the way.

Hannibal smiles, and purrs, and takes one of Will's pawns with his Queen.

Will doesn't wait for him to speak – his eyes are wide and a beautiful gold. "You like that idea," he says, his fingers curling at the edge of the chessboard. Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "Of me defending myself, fighting for my nest and my young."

"I wouldn't want a mate who would let himself be overrun by a single man."

Will tilts his head to one side. "And yet you enjoy your dominion over me."

Hannibal shrugs. "It is my right," he replies, and Will frowns. "Just as it is your right to demand my protection and my love, until I can give no more of either."

"I demand everything of you," Will replies. He sits up straighter, his next move forgotten.

"And I give it freely," Hannibal says. He smiles when Will's frown deepens. "I am not a man of rash action, Will. As we became friends, I felt the potential for more between us, and as I told you before, when you went into rut, I saw that potential realized."

"You want a madman for a mate," Will says quietly. "A wild dog on a leash only you control."

"Is that how you feel, right now?" Hannibal asks. "Like a wild dog on a leash?"

At that, Will huffs a small laugh, and shakes his head. "No," he replies. He doesn't say anything else. He takes another of Hannibal's pawns with his castle. "Checkmate."

Hannibal looks down at the board. Indeed, it is a Checkmate. He smiles. "You are a devious thing," he says.

Will hums, and stands, and takes a seat next to Hannibal on the same couch. He leans his forehead against Hannibal's arm and Hannibal lifts it, wrapping it around Will's shoulders and allowing him to cuddle up close, his feet on the couch and his knees resting on Hannibal's thigh.

Will tilts his head up and kisses Hannibal's neck, where the mating bite should have gone. "I demand your love," he whispers, and Hannibal shivers. "And your loyalty. I demand to be

your equal, as you have said so often you want me to be. I give you mine in return – my adoration, my fealty, my heat and my children. All of it is yours."

Hannibal swallows, and feels Will's smile against his neck.

Alana arrives in time for dinner. Will has not succumbed to his heat yet, and seems alert and vibrant. He and Hannibal have both showered for the sake of propriety. Even though Alana cannot smell the finer hints of their mating, she would be able to smell sex lingering on both of them, which Hannibal considers impolite.

He leads her to the kitchen, where Will is consuming the second half of the casserole. Her eyes light up and she smiles in something like relief when Will turns to regard her.

"It's good to see you," she breathes, and walks over to embrace him. Hannibal swallows, resisting the urge to snarl at her, and reminds himself to thoroughly wipe her scent off of Will when she is gone.

"I wish it was under better circumstances," Will replies brightly, with a tired smile. He nods to the folder in her hand. "Is this it?"

"We don't need to get into that," Alana says, and sets the folder down. Hannibal takes it before she can do anything else, and she shoots him a look and sits on the second barstool. "How are you?"

"Alana," Will says softly, and takes her hand in a gentle grip, "I appreciate it, really, but I'm okay. And without getting too into it, I don't really have that long before I'm not all that useful to you, or Jack. Please, let me see the file."

Her jaw clenches, but when Hannibal meets her eyes, she gives a reluctant nod. Will smiles, letting go of her hand, and reaches out to take the file from Hannibal.

He opens it, his eyes scanning the photographs and autopsy reports. Hannibal is pleased to see a small strike of outrage in his eyes before it's wiped away. Will knows it's a copycat, and is angry at the sight. "When were the bodies found?"

"This morning," Alana replies. Her eyes are on the bite mark on Will's neck. "Husband and wife, posed like angels at the foot of the bed." Her jaw clenches again. "He slept in it while they knelt there."

Will hums. The couples' skin has been flayed from their backs, hooked up to look like macabre angels. There's something strangely poetic in that, and Hannibal might admire it if not for the fact that Jack is so eager to put his name to it.

Will shakes his head. "It's not the Ripper," he says, and touches the photographs. Alana nods, drumming her fingers against the countertop. "This is...worshipful. The Ripper slaughters his victims like pigs, and discards them when he's done with them." He looks up and meets

Hannibal's eyes, and smiles. "This killer of yours doesn't care who sees his work, he doesn't do it for an audience."

"Why, then?" Alana asks.

Will sighs, and takes a bite of his food. "For comfort," he replies. "The angels watch over him while he sleeps, and sings him to his rest." He swallows the food. "He's dying, and he's afraid of dying in his sleep."

Alana shakes her head, her eyes wide and disbelieving. "How can you possibly get that from a photograph?" she asks, and takes the folder back when Will closes it and slides it to her.

Will smiles. "I've found myself much more centered under Doctor Lecter's care," he says, soft with affection. Hannibal purrs, openly, knowing Alana cannot hear it, and Will's cheeks turn pink. "I see much more clearly, even than I did before. About everything."

"Jack will be glad to hear it," Alana says, "when and if the Ripper decides to resurface."

Will frowns, feigning shock. "He hasn't killed again?" he asks.

Alana shakes her head. "No," she says. "But I feel..."

She hesitates and Will turns to regard her. "Yes?"

"I feel something coming. Something big. I think he's gearing up for something."

"A performance to outrival all others," Hannibal murmurs. What a novel idea. He thinks of Will prowling with him through the night, their eyes on the necks of their next prey, of feeding Will the meat from their kill and teaching Will to cook well enough to show the same mastery. It would be a symphony all its own.

Alana hums, looking troubled. "I'll tell Jack what you told me," she says, and stands.

"Can I offer you anything? It's a long drive back."

"Thank you, but no," Alana says. She tucks the folder under her arm and smiles at Will. It's a tight, sad smile, like a mother when sending her child out into the world for the first time. "It's good to see you, Will," she says, and rests a hand on his shoulder. "I think this atmosphere suits you much better than Jack."

Hannibal swallows so that he doesn't laugh. He does smile, though, and wonders how she would react if Hannibal or Will were to reveal just how closely these two environments overlap.

"Let me walk you out," Hannibal says, and gestures to the door. She nods, and leaves with one final look over her shoulder, and Hannibal closes and locks the door.

Will is standing when he returns, his food forgotten, and he takes Hannibal by the shirt and pulls him in for a deep kiss that makes Hannibal shiver. "There's a perverse pleasure in being the only ones in on a secret," he says.

Hannibal smiles. "What secret would that be?"

Will's eyes flash and he shakes his head. "You will always be a dancer, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs, quiet and adoring.

"And the music we waltz to is complex and beautiful," Hannibal replies. Will's smile widens.

"If I might be so crass, I think I would prefer to tango right now."

Hannibal laughs, and takes Will by the hair and kisses him again. Another demand of Will's he is all too happy to indulge.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Will's body succumbs to his heat not long after Alana leaves, like he had been waiting for her to go so that he could respond to his instincts with more vigor. In fact, it is in the middle of mating with him again that Hannibal catches the change in his sweat, the way his eyes get more and more golden until there is nothing left of the original color, and his scent turns sweet and thick, and he gets wetter between his legs like Hannibal has flooded him and he cannot contain it all.

Will arches, moaning quietly as Hannibal drags his nails down Will's chest and cups his hips, keeping him pinned with his weight as he continues to thrust into Will – it's brutal and fast. Hannibal can sense Will's increasing need and finds himself compelled to answer in kind.

Will stretches out underneath him, purring and fine, his head tilted to one side as Hannibal covers him and kisses his red cheek. He's gasping – tiny little cries punched out of him that match every time Hannibal sinks deeply into him, like he wants to make more noise but can't catch the air for them. There's a whine stuck in his chest and Hannibal feels it like a hook in his belly – it compels him to fuck Will harder, to cover and stain him, to feed and protect him.

He is as much the delicate siren and the rocks on which ships are destroyed. Hannibal crashes against him, called by his sweet noises, and he digs his nails into Will's hips and opens his mouth wide on the back of Will's neck.

Will whimpers, pulling his knees together so that he's lifted higher against Hannibal's weight, begging for Hannibal to go deeper and harder until their bones are little more than dust. "Hannibal, *please*," he growls, and it is a growl, demanding and rough. His nails catch in the sheets and drag down. Hannibal thinks he might have heard something rip, and he smiles.

He sinks his teeth into Will's nape and Will shivers, reaching back and knotting one hand in Hannibal's hair. "Yes," he moans, his throat wrecked, voice raw. Hannibal growls when he hears Will's Voice coming through – it's a subtle change, a slight after-effect like an echo, a soft murmur in a crowd. But Hannibal hears it, and it kicks something in his chest, forces him to tighten his hands and drive into Will more harshly.

"Please, *please*," Will says, and he's howling for Hannibal, his Voice thick in his throat, and Hannibal can't resist. He snarls and bites down harder on Will's neck, and he's not sure either of them knows whether it's meant to be an encouragement or deterrent. Everything is blurring too closely together. He wants to split Will's skin and sate his thirst with Will's blood, but he thinks in the same instant that Will might want to be consumed just as much.

Will trembles, curling up under Hannibal, arching against his bare chest. Hannibal starts to slow when he feels Will bearing down, smells the sharp sweetness of his orgasm like sugared lemons. But Will reaches back and claws at his flanks, his hips – any part that he can reach.

Will snarls and Hannibal feels the order in his lungs. "Don't stop," he growls, voice raw. "Swear to God I'll kill you if you stop."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, kissing the raw bite mark on Will's neck. "Why would I ever stop dancing with such a magnificent partner?" he asks, but Will is in no mood for pretty words or metaphors.

He stretches out again and moans, tilting his head so Hannibal can see, past his sweat-damp hair and the red of his cheeks, the brightness of his golden eyes and the bared whites of his teeth. He is an animal, in the height of heat where he'd said his body would demand Hannibal's knot every hour at least, and Hannibal is *ready*, eager to give it to him. He wants Will sweaty and shaking all the time. The only acceptable alternative is to see him pink and pregnant, and even then, Hannibal cannot promise he will be able to resist mounting Will just like this. Nor, does he think, Will would tolerate going through his pregnancy untouched.

He prowls over Will, one hand flattening on the bed and around Will's shoulder, and he nuzzles the back of Will's head, kisses his bloody neck, and then puts his lips by Will's ear and wraps his other hand around Will's cock.

Will flinches, whining softly, his Voice a heavy undercurrent like adding salt to caramel. It makes his regular whines seem that much sweeter and plaintive, like Will is able and willing to do anything Hannibal desires if he grants his mate relief.

Will's body is so eager to breed, so responsive to Hannibal's touches, that even with his recent orgasm, Hannibal can feel him hardening again as Hannibal touches him. His slick is leaking down his thighs, he's soaked to the core and his cock is dirty from sweat and release. He's terribly marked, disgusting with his need, made all the more delicious and beautiful for it.

Will gasps, bowing his head and lifting his shoulders and neck to Hannibal's mouth. "*Hannibal*," he moans, trembling from his neck to his thighs, fingers curling in the rumpled and wet bedding. Hannibal lets out a soft growl against his shoulder and bites him where the muscle becomes the dip above his spine and Will jerks and cries out, shuddering with pleasure.

Hannibal smells tears. He pulls back with a growl and Will howls like the action is the same as tearing sutures from a wound. Hannibal smiles and takes Will by the hair, pulling him upright.

"Get on your back for me, darling," he says, and Will nods, licking his lips and rolling onto his back, bare and beautifully spread for Hannibal's ravenous gaze. Will reaches for him, cages Hannibal's hips with his thighs and his calves when he bends his legs tight, and his eyes flutter shut when Hannibal braces himself under Will's arms and sinks back into his body.

Will gasps, his lips the same red as his cheeks and his chest. He is delectable, a fine-cut steak seasoned with mint and lemongrass, and when Hannibal leans down to kiss his exposed throat, he can feel Will's heart tremble against his lips.

Hannibal opens his jaws and sinks his teeth into the tendon, just below Will's Adam's apple, and Will moans and rakes his nails down Hannibal's bare back in return.

"Fuck," Will hisses, the curse caged behind his teeth as he digs his nails into Hannibal's back, raises red lines of stinging heat that flare with every twitch and judder of their bodies colliding. His eyes are shining and wet as the rest of him – Hannibal has never seen such rapturous agony. "*God*, it hurts -. I -."

"I know, darling," Hannibal whispers, and leans down to kiss Will's gasping mouth, nuzzles and licks the tears and sweat from his cheek. Their noses brush and their foreheads touch and Will stares up at him with raw adoration.

Will's breath leaves him, unsteady and shaky. "You feel so good," he says, and Hannibal's jaw clenches. He closes his eyes and Will lets out a needy sound, leaning up and kissing open-mouthed at Hannibal's neck. One of his hands slides to curl around Hannibal's skull to hold him up as Hannibal lowers himself to Will's body and wraps his arms under Will's back.

"Please," Will whispers, his mouth dragging wet and open on Hannibal's neck. "Please, Hannibal, knot me. I need it." And Hannibal knows he does – he wants to, he wants to cover and consume his mate and prove that he will sate his needs.

Hannibal digs his nails into Will's back and thrusts deep, growling low in his chest as he feels his knot start to swell. He is compelled to rut against Will's slick ass, as deep as he can go, and when his knot is full and he feels his orgasm wash over him, he hears Will give a desperate, sated moan, and Will kisses his neck in reward and thanksgiving.

Hannibal rears back and puts his hand back on Will's cock, coaxing him to his release once more. Will whimpers, eyes shining, and he grits his teeth and clenches his eyes tightly shut as Hannibal draws it out of him, watches the stain of his release paint his chest and stomach. He's absolutely beautiful like this, as gorgeous as the finest piece of art Hannibal has ever seen.

Hannibal falls over him and kisses him, just as desperate as Will to drink the moans from his mouth and taste Will's need. Will shivers, trembling below him and curling up tight so that Hannibal is covering most of his body, and Hannibal plants his elbows above Will's shoulders, cutting off his sight lines and shielding his eyes.

Will kisses him again, and again, his ass clenching up around Hannibal's knot like it hasn't come yet, like he stills needs to be mounted and filled. Hannibal growls again, unable to help himself, and submits to another of Will's needy kisses. He thinks he could happily spend the rest of his life in this moment, mounting and sating his mate with everything he can offer.

It's attachment, codependency, and Hannibal had thought he'd been prepared for it. He realizes now that he'd been a fool, to think that he could mate with someone like Will and feel nothing.

Will pulls back, resting his head on the pillows, and breathes out shakily, his eyes half-lidded and a ghost of a smile on his face, too tired to show his teeth, but it reaches his eyes.

Then he sighs, exhaustion loosening his mouth and sagging his chest. Hannibal smiles down at him, and leans in for another kiss that Will eagerly grants him. "How are you feeling?" Hannibal asks.

Will lets out a shaky laugh. "Like I have a fish on a hook, and he's fighting me."

Hannibal's eyebrows raise. "Am I the fish in this metaphor?"

Will smiles and shakes his head, cupping Hannibal's cheek in a loving touch. "No," he replies. His legs loosen around Hannibal's waist, his feet plant on the bed as he goes lax. "You're the current, threatening to sweep me away, but also keeping me grounded. You bring me gravity."

"To weigh you down?"

"To keep me centered." Will sighs through his nose and props himself up on his free elbow, still holding Hannibal's face. He rests their foreheads together and smiles. "I am the sea, and you are the shore, and I will lead ships to your harbor for you to do with as you will."

Hannibal huffs. "And you accuse me of speaking in too much metaphor."

"I can be direct when I need to be," Will replies coolly. He lays back down and Hannibal covers him, tucking his face into Will's neck, and Will leans his head to one side to give him room. He pets through Hannibal's hair and down the lines he raised on Hannibal's back, and Hannibal purrs against him. "Part of me wants to stay here forever, with you, by the sea."

Hannibal hums. "Technically, there's no reason we can't. I have means enough to take care of us."

Will laughs. "We can't," he replies. "There are killers to catch."

"The copycat."

"And more." Will sighs and shakes his head. "Jack will never let me be free of him. I think I could try to retire and he would hunt me down like a fox with his hounds."

Hannibal swallows back his growl, but he's not sure Will doesn't feel the tension in his shoulders. He lifts his head to meet Will's eyes. "I wish I could free you from him," he murmurs.

Will bites his lower lip. His eyes duck down, to Hannibal's chest, then back up. He flattens his hands on Hannibal's chest and slides them up to cup his jaw and meets Hannibal's gaze again. "...Maybe you could," he replies, equally soft.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side.

Will bites his lower lip and tilts his head to one side, showing his neck. "What do you think Jack would do?" he asks. "If he knew who the Ripper was?"

Hannibal blinks, then frowns. "Arrest him, probably."

Will smiles, his eyes slanting back to meet Hannibal's. "You think Jack would have such restraint?" he says.

"He is a man of the law," Hannibal replies. "By that right, he is forced to act within it."

"And what if he couldn't?" Will murmurs. "I think a man like Jack could be easily persuaded to act with more...instinct. Jack is an aggressive Chess player."

Hannibal swallows, and wants to pull back, but his knot is still very much stuck in Will and he would never harm his mate by forcing it out too soon. He could tear Will, or hurt him, and he will not do it. So instead he pulls his knees up and lifts Will into his lap, and Will follows him when Hannibal embraces him and turns so that his back is to the headboard, Will settling heavily across his lap.

Hannibal considers him for a moment, torn between exposing the ugly truth to the light and toying in the darkness with Will's metaphors. Will smiles and kisses him and it feels like he's being drugged, reduced to pliancy with Will's mouth and Will's hands gentle on his chest.

"I think it's time for one last symphony," Will murmurs. "A final send-off for the touring troupe before it moves on."

"What do you suggest?" Hannibal asks.

"I want Jack to see the Ripper," Will says. "I want him to know, and to see what I see. No smoke, no mirrors. Just the animals we are, rutting in the mud and trying to figure out what to do next to survive."

"Forgive me, Will, but I don't understand."

Will smiles, soft and dark. "Yes you do," he replies, and touches Hannibal's cheek. "I'm tired of prowling in the dark, Hannibal. There was a strain on my eyes, and now it's been lifted. The Ripper has his mate, and together they will breed a new line of a superior kind. And Jack will be the first witness to it, like Darwin with his finches."

Hannibal swallows. His knot deflates, and Will trembles when his slick leaks out and stains their thighs. He doesn't move, but rocks his hips, eyelids fluttering as he feels Hannibal still spreading him open. He moans quietly and kisses Hannibal's neck.

"Tell me, Hannibal," he whispers, "what do you think rut feels like? Or do you remember it from your adolescence?"

Hannibal sucks in a breath, his hands landing on Will's hips and encouraging him to move. He's sure he could knot Will again with no reprieve, if Will keeps talking like this and touching him like this. Will's voice is low and lilting, seductive like a siren song.

He closes his eyes and remembers the one and only time he went into rut. It had been after he'd found out what those men had done to Mischa, right before he'd slaughtered them all and chewed the meat from their bones.

"It feels like evolution," Hannibal murmurs. "It is invincibility, and rage."

Will hums. "And what do you think Jack, that perfect lawman, would do if he was in rut and had the Ripper standing right in front of him?"

"I think it would be a very bloody orchestra, indeed."

Will pulls back and rests his forehead on Hannibal's, smiling. "Imagine it," he whispers. "A rutting Alpha invades the home of a mated pair. He attacks the Alpha, demands his rights to the Omega's body and mind, and the Alpha kills him in self-defense. Then they flee, feeling no longer safe in their home, and travel to Italy to live out the rest of their days."

"That sounds...very believable," Hannibal says. "To everyone who doesn't know Jack."

"I know Jack," Will replies, rocking his hips with more fervor, now. Hannibal growls when he feels himself hardening, Will's slick and his tight body encouraging him to want to knot again. Will's chest is red, his eyes glowing, and he reaches down and wraps his fingers around his cock, stroking slowly. He's aroused by the idea of Hannibal killing Jack, of that Hannibal has no doubt. "His obsession with the Ripper is like an imprint on my skin, a map I can read like no other. I can make him see whatever we need him to see, I can make him do whatever we need him to do."

"And what is that, Will?" Hannibal whispers. There's a purr building in his chest, aroused by the bloodthirsty light in Will's eye. It's as beautiful as the rest of him, as lovely as a fresh dawn after a blood moon.

Will smiles. "Don't play coy," he replies. He leans in and kisses below Hannibal's ear, his hand sliding up to dig into Hannibal's shoulders. "When I was in rut, all I could think about was how good blood would taste in my mouth. I felt myself evolving, felt like there was a piece of me long-dormant that had been awakened. And now you've let that piece of me free. What are you going to do about it, Hannibal?"

"You are not a leashed animal to me, Will," Hannibal replies. "I would let you do as you pleased."

Will smiles, kisses Hannibal's neck. He rolls his body against Hannibal's chest, seeking his warmth and strength, and Hannibal growls and digs his nails tighter into Will's hips. "I will bring Jack to you, then," he says. "That would please me most."

"It'll be dangerous."

Will pulls back and kisses Hannibal – deeply, passionately, cupping Hannibal's skull. Hannibal feels a deep, dark urge pulling at him, the same as hunger, roaring in need as Will kisses him. Like a wolf howling for a hunt, Hannibal's ears are perked up and he aches to give chase.

He rolls Will onto his back and thrusts into him and Will moans, clawing at Hannibal's chest. "I ask you to trust me," Will whispers, voice tight around his snarl. "Trust me as I trust you. Love me as I love you. And let the music play."

Hannibal kisses him, for he cannot think of anything else to say. Will's darkness calls to him, he is a dim lighthouse on the shore and Hannibal is sailing towards him at full speed, ready to be destroyed on the rocks. The current of Will's love draws him forward to his inevitable end.

"I will never betray you," Will says. His hands are starting to shake, his eyes glowing gold. He reaches down to touch himself again and his body gives a spasm of arousal, his chest heaving with pleasure. "I will never turn away from you. You are mine, and I will protect you."

This is my design.

"Then, by all means," Hannibal replies, stuttering around his purr, "let me hear your symphony."

Will smiles, loving, adoring, worshipful, and they crash together once again.

Will's heat lasts for two more days. Hannibal mounts him in their bed, on the couch, on the staircase when Will stumbles to his knees and cannot move another step. He feeds Will as much as he is able, watches as his metabolism burns away all the excess to him until he is lean and fit. When it's over and Will is able to stay lucid for more than a few hours, Hannibal creates a feast for him from the stores that are left in his kitchen, knowing that they will be leaving this place behind. Perhaps forever.

Will purrs whenever Hannibal looks at him, arches his neck and puts his cheek in Hannibal's hands and against his shoulder. He's placative and trusting, as sweet as a newborn and as deadly as a seasoned warrior, and he is Hannibal's.

Will pours out the bottle of aspirin and suppressants and throws them both away. "I haven't had a headache since we came here," he says when Hannibal looks at him in question. "I'm starting to think I'll never be sick again."

"Now that your body isn't fighting your nature, I feel less conflict in you," Hannibal replies.

Will smiles and kisses him. "You have revitalized me," he murmurs. "Given me sanctuary and safety. I promise you the same in return; a place for you in my head and my heart and my bed."

"And I accept it," Hannibal replies, smiling and purring. He cups Will's neck and kisses him again, pressing him against the kitchen island. "I take all of you as you are. My perfect equal and opposite."

Will smiles, huffing a laugh. Their embrace is intimate yet chaste – they know the outside world calls them back, and soon Hannibal will have his greatest desire. He will hunt with Will, chase and corner their prey, and create one last performance piece to rival all others. His chest burns with excitement.

Will kisses him one more time, steady and sure, full of promise. "Come, Doctor Lecter," he rumbles, his Voice rumbling his throat and tugging on Hannibal's belly. "We have a killer to catch, and another one to create."

Chapter End Notes

So I'm heading out of town this weekend. I'll be able to write, but I'm not sure how much, so please don't worry if there's a delay! I know things are getting intense now and I won't leave you hanging. Have a great weekend everyone!

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

I'm driving back home tonight so I'll probably have another update for you Wednesday. I hope everyone had a great weekend!

An Omega's happy, sated scent after a heat is like walking past a candle store during the shift from winter to spring. The mint and cinnamon and overabundance of clearance pumpkin-spice candles are gone, replaced with 'beach breeze' and 'fresh laundry', sea-air and salt on a margarita glass. Pineapple and strawberry and mango. It's sweet and sits heavy on the tongue, clogs the throat like honey mead.

It's a powerful shift in Will's scent and Hannibal breathes it in greedily, windows rolled up and heat on high despite the relative warmth in the car where the sun is shining in and heating the windows. There's a flush on Will's face and neck, but he doesn't complain. Hannibal is probably giving off a contented scent of his own that he is just as eager to consume.

Hannibal has a classical music station on, the soft sound of violins filling the car in lieu of conversation. It's a pleasant atmosphere, and he images the same when they are on the beaches of Italy, watching their children play in the water and on the sand. He imagines Will, relaxed and fine, maybe pregnant with their next child, a glass of iced chamomile in his hands, splayed out but as attentive as Hannibal, watching their children with a calm mix of protectiveness and joy.

Will hums, lifting his head from where he'd had it resting on his hand, and straightens up in his seat. "How many?" he asks, his voice soft.

Hannibal tilts his head to one side to show he's listening. "How many what?"

"How many children should we have?" Will asks. Like he knows what Hannibal had been thinking about. Perhaps his daydreams had been in a similar place, in the back garden of Hannibal's mind palace where it's full of gorgeous blue oceans and buildings made of gold. "I want at least two."

"An Alpha and a girl?" Hannibal replies.

Will smiles, showing his teeth. "Yes," he says.

"I think we should have as many as physically possible," Hannibal says mildly.

Will laughs. "That sounds very chaotic, Doctor Lecter," he replies, but Hannibal can smell the thickness of his scent and knows Will likes that idea. Typically Omegas are at their most fertile during their heats, and after giving birth they are usually dry for three to six months

after the fact. But Will's body is close to the end of its fertile years and after so long on suppressants, he wouldn't be surprised if Will attempted to breed with Hannibal as soon as he could, when his chest is still tender and wet and it hurts to take Hannibal's knot.

"When the chaos is of our own making, it is much more manageable," Hannibal says.

Will hums.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal adds, taking the exit from the small road leading to his cabin and heading towards the highway. Will turns his head to regard him and Hannibal can feel Will's golden gaze on the side of his face. "How does the chaos you propose with Jack play out in your head, here?"

Will smiles. "You're a much more talented composer than I am," he replies smoothly. "You tell me."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "Experienced, maybe," he says. "I'm beginning to think...not more talented."

"You accuse me of hiding something from you again?" Will asks. His scent is still contented, his tone playful. He's teasing Hannibal, dangling another shred of truth in front of him like a carrot for a horse. He doesn't wait for Hannibal to respond; "What might I have composed?"

"I'm beginning to wonder about the transparency of this situation," Hannibal says, and he smiles. "You have admitted that you allowed me to become attached to you, before any of this started. You are a fine fisherman, Will, and I'm starting to think the best of your kind. Were you always prey, or simply a very good lure?"

"Can I not function as both?" Will asks, and reaches out to gently touch Hannibal's thigh. Hannibal pushes his thigh into Will's touch, setting the cruise control on the car so that he doesn't have to use his feet. Will's fingers squeeze the muscle gently. "After a certain point, the chase becomes tiresome, Doctor Lecter. And after a while one must concede that the fish simply aren't going to bite."

"You said you felt my touch on the whole thing," Hannibal says, "and yet here you are, admitting that your hands have been in the bowl alongside mine, kneading the dough for the final meal."

"I suppose with clarity comes foresight," Will murmurs. Then, he sighs, and pulls his hand away. Where his touch was, Hannibal feels like his thigh burns. "I'll confess to you, then, if you promise not to react...poorly."

"I could never be angry with you, my dear."

Will smiles, and sits back in his chair, head tilted up to expose his neck. "I knew as soon as I learned that Tobias was dead," he says. Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "I never told you what he said or did when I went to his shop."

"No," Hannibal replies. "You didn't."

"It wasn't a swift attack," Will murmurs. "I came in with those two men, and Tobias showed me around his shop while they waited outside. He touched me – he looked into my eyes and put his hands on my face and I let him do it. And I felt something, and I didn't know what it was. Then Alana touched me the same way and I realized what it I'd felt, because she didn't have it. He had the hands of a killer, but it wasn't the *right* killer."

"You wanted the Ripper's hands on you."

"Yes," Will breathes. "I looked at Tobias and realized I would never be an equal in his eyes. He would not try to impress me, or regard me as an equal and opposite. I would be a slave to his will, a pet he took out to parade at dinner parties while I grew fat and weak with his children."

Hannibal stifles a growl, his knuckles tightening on the steering wheel. He's forced to disengage the cruise control when someone pulls in front of him, and slows the car to a comfortable cruising speed just shy of the speed limit.

"That was when I knew," Will continues, his words hesitant like he can smell Hannibal's anger. He isn't afraid, but assessing. Hannibal knows he's attuned to every swallow, every twitch of Hannibal's mouth, every shift of his weight. "And it enraged me. It made me realize that there was only ever going to be one Alpha that could suit my needs."

"The Ripper."

"*You*," Will says, and Hannibal turns his head briefly to regard him. Will's eyes are bright, his upper lip curling back just briefly, before Hannibal has to put his eyes on the road again. "You are my mate, my perfect counterpart, and when I look at you I think of Tobias, and I think of Jack, and I think of Alana. And none of them compare."

"If you're trying to placate me, Will, I assure you there's no need."

"I know that," Will breathes, and reaches out to touch Hannibal again, this time on his arm. "You killed Tobias, and you told me he said he'd attacked me. I could see that it angered you. I knew that you would kill for me, and fight for me, and I hadn't done the same."

"You're ashamed by that."

"Two good men died because I didn't trust and didn't listen what my gut told me," Will says. "I'm listening now. I'm listening and I hear. A melody. A composer. You're standing behind the conductor's sheets and I play for you just as much as I sit in the audience. It's orbit, and navigation, like our stars are one and the same now."

Hannibal smiles. "When you bring Jack to me, will you be in the audience, or part of the symphony?"

Will smiles back, lopsided and eager and adoring. "Both and neither," he replies. "But whatever happens, know that I am thinking of Florence, and our children, and the ocean."

Hannibal frowns. "'Whatever happens'?"

"Jack may try and use his Voice on me," Will replies. "I must keep my own a secret, for now."

Hannibal nods. Although an Alpha's Voice is triggered most suddenly and strongly by an Omega's pair bond and the act of biting them during mating, Alphas that are mated to women have their own. Hannibal remembers seeing the bite on Bella's neck. Jack is a strong Alpha, and has been mated for much longer than Will and Hannibal have, and has known and guarded Will for much longer as well. If Hannibal is not in the room to override Jack's commands, Will may succumb to them through the fault of his own breed.

"We must be very careful, then," Hannibal murmurs.

Will nods. He pulls back, his eyes alighting on a rest stop sign saying that the pull off is coming within the next two miles. "Stop here," he says, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows, but obeys. There are a few cars parked, three eighteen-wheelers docked in the truck stop part of the station. Will gets out of the car and circles to Hannibal's side, taking him by the hands and pushing his body close into Hannibal's arms.

Will lifts his mouth for a kiss that Hannibal eagerly grants him, drinking in Will's sweet moan and cupping his neck. "Come with me," Will growls, and leads Hannibal to one of the disabled bathroom stalls. Will closes it, locks it, and tests the strength of the door by throwing himself against Hannibal's chest. He's as frantic and desperate as when he was in heat – so much so that for a moment Hannibal fears he might have regressed.

But then Will pulls back, smiling and beautiful and wholly in control of what he's doing, and Hannibal can't help purring at the sight. Will coaxed him close, forced Hannibal to give chase, and now he's turned and caught Hannibal in his claws once again.

Hannibal smiles and touches his face, and Will purrs, turning his head to kiss Hannibal's palm. Then he goes to his knees, pulls impatiently at Hannibal's clothes, and swallows Hannibal down with another moan, like there's a dryness in his mouth that only Hannibal can sate.

Hannibal bares his teeth to stop himself growling, but threads both hands through Will's soft hair as Will moves. He sucks Hannibal to orgasm, and Hannibal growls when Will swallows him down, one hand on Hannibal's abdomen to force him back so he doesn't knot Will's mouth. Hannibal's hand is tight in his hair and he growls as he feels Will's tongue against the head of his cock, coaxing every last drop of seed from him. He can smell Will's arousal, wants to turn him and knot him in the dirty stall, but Will pulls away and wipes the back of his hand over his mouth, his eyes glowing, his smile lopsided and gleeful.

He kisses Hannibal and shares the taste of him with his Alpha, one hand over Hannibal's hammering heart. "Let's go home."

Hannibal drives Will to his house. Alana's car is there, and when they park she comes out to a flurry of barking dogs. The dogs run straight for Will – and, Hannibal is surprised to note, himself as well. They greet him like Hannibal and Will are both their masters, and Will laughs and kneels down within his pack, accepting their kisses and wagging tails, petting each of them in turn.

Hannibal raises his gaze to Alana, where she's standing on the porch with her arms folded. She's smiling, though, clearly picking up Will's happiness and joy, and she gives Hannibal a nod that feels like acceptance and respect.

Will stands and takes his suitcase from Hannibal with a grateful smile, and they both head to the house. She steps to one side to allow him in and then when Will sets his suitcase down, they embrace tightly. Will puts his nose to her neck, breathing in her scent, and when he pulls back he's smiling.

"You look so much better," Alana murmurs, petting a gentle hand through Will's hair to push it back from his face.

Will laughs. "I feel better," he replies. Winston is nosing at his pockets, tail wagging wildly, and Will kneels down to cup his face and pet his fluffy neck. "Thank you for taking care of them while I was gone."

"Of course," Alana says, and she's smiling again. She looks to Hannibal and Hannibal smiles back at her, pleased and purring at seeing his mate so happy. They will have to get a dog when they're in Florence, he decides. They cannot take all of these animals with them, but Will clearly finds such joy in caring for the dogs. Perhaps he will begin adopting the Italian strays as well. Hannibal will allow it, provided they don't overrun them and the animals are careful with his mate and children.

"I'll leave you guys to it," Alana says after another moment. "Jack will be anxious to hear you're in good health."

"Yes," Will says, standing. He sheds his coat and lays it over a chair. "And I'm sure he'll be glad to have me working on the copycat as well. Have there been any more murders?"

"None that he's told me about, but I can ask," Alana says.

"I'm sure one way or another, Jack will find a way of informing me," Will replies, his smile belying the subtly icy tone in his voice. Hannibal aches for the time when there is no more mystery, no more secrecy in Will's life. Will and Hannibal will hunt together, slaughter together, and feast together, and as his lovely mate said, they will have the perverse pleasure of being the only ones in on a secret.

Alana smiles again, and pulls Will into another tight hug. "I'm seriously so glad you're okay," she murmurs, almost too quietly for Hannibal to hear.

Will smiles, his eyes bright. "We'll have to catch up over dinner sometime," he says, and Hannibal cocks his head to one side, unsure if Will's words have a second meaning behind them.

Of course, his black widow always has spiderwebs behind his words. Will catches his eyes and Hannibal smiles. "I owe Jack information as well," he says. "We'll all have dinner together this week, and catch up."

"That sounds great," Alana says, and Hannibal walks out with her. She sighs and turns to look at him once they're at the driver-side door of her car. "I'm big enough to know when I was wrong," she says, and Hannibal tilts his head to one side. "This therapy was good for Will. I'm sorry I spoke so strongly against it before."

"You are protective of him," Hannibal replies, and Alana presses her lips together and nods. "I don't fault you for that. If you felt no regard for Will, I would think you a very poor friend indeed."

She smiles, strained and soft. "Take care of him, Hannibal," she says, and squeezes his arm. Then she gets in her car and drives off. Hannibal watches her go.

"Hannibal," Will calls, and Hannibal turns to see him standing in the doorway. Without his coat on, he looks bare and chilly, shivering from the cool air in comparison to the heat of his house and Hannibal's car. He smiles at Hannibal, sly and wanting, and reaches out to him.

Hannibal smiles back, and goes.

Will takes him into his bedroom and shuts the dogs out. He kisses Hannibal fiercely, his hands gentle in Hannibal's hair, a soft whine stuck in his throat when Hannibal growls against his pink mouth and turns him so he can shove Will against a wall.

"Stay on your feet, this time," he commands when Will tries to push him away to make room enough for him to kneel. Will swallows, a flicker of something unnamable in his eyes, and he bites his lower lip and nods.

He puts his nose under Hannibal's jaw and whimpers. "You can't knot me," he whispers, and Hannibal frowns. He pulls back, puts a hand in Will's hair, and tilts his head up until Will's lowered eyes have no choice but to rise to his.

"Why not?" Hannibal replies, forcing back the instinctive growl he wants to let out, *again*, at listening to his mate deny Hannibal his rights to Will's body. Every time Will has done something like this, there has been a reason.

Will whines again, his hands resting gently on Hannibal's chest. "It hurts," he says quietly, flinching like Hannibal moved to strike him. It makes Hannibal let go of him entirely, speared in a place he can't identify when Will whines again.

"You can mount me," he says, showing the same frantic energy he'd used in the bathroom stall. "It's just the knotting part that hurts. Or I can use my mouth. I can -."

"Will, stop," Hannibal says, putting in just enough of his Voice that Will immediately obeys. His jaws snap shut, teeth clicking together, and he looks at Hannibal with wide eyes when Hannibal approaches him again. He leans in to rest their foreheads together and puts his hands gently on Will's flanks. "Do you think I would hurt you?"

"I don't know," Will murmurs. "But I love you, and I want you, and I'm afraid."

"What are you afraid of?" Hannibal asks. Their noses brush and Will sucks in a shaky breath.

"I know Jack," he says. "When I put him in rut, he's going to react...poorly."

"Afraid for your neck?" Hannibal says, and Will bites his lip and nods. "When you imagine teeth closing around your throat, ripping you from your spine, are they Jack's teeth? Or mine?"

"Just tell me that you trust me," Will says. He lifts his head enough that Hannibal has to pull back to see his eyes. They're greener now, reacting to the trees and the sun, that ever-present gold a lovely harmonious break between the color and the black of his iris.

Will touches his cheek and pushes close so he can run his nose under Hannibal's jaw. Hannibal shivers, his hands tightening on Will's flanks. "Do you trust me?" Will asks, his teeth touching where the mating bite would have gone if Will had bitten him properly. Perhaps he will, once they're in Florence.

"Yes," Hannibal replies, and wonders if he is making a mistake by doing so.

Will smiles, and kisses Hannibal's neck. "Good," he whispers, rough and low, and goes to his knees once again.

Hannibal goes back to his home to unpack his things. A few hours later, Will drives and parks on the street and enters the house without a word. Hannibal hides his smile, pleased that his theory is proving true – now that they're mated, Will has no need to be anywhere but by Hannibal's side. And Hannibal will admit that he felt a terrible, throbbing ache in his chest for those few hours between leaving Will's house and greeting him at the door.

Will sets his stuff upstairs and comes back to the kitchen, taking a seat on a barstool and propping his elbows up on the counter. Hannibal offers him a glass of wine in silence and Will raises an eyebrow and nods.

"When is dinner?" he asks after a moment.

"I was thinking a Friday night."

Will purses his lips, and shakes his head. "Too much traffic," he replies. "Especially towards D.C."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows and pours Will a glass. "Perhaps a Sunday, then."

Will hums, taking a long sip. He holds the glass with both hands, shoulders curled up, his eyes on the refrigerator behind Hannibal. "Sunday could work."

"Why bother with this dinner at all?" Hannibal murmurs. "We could leave. Tonight. As easily as we left the cabin."

Will's eyes flash. "You know why," he says into his glass. He sets it down again. "Jack won't let me go if there's still a killer to catch. And if you and I leave, and Ripper murders mysteriously stop, it'll be too suspicious." He looks up and meets Hannibal's gaze again. "This is the only way."

"Trigger a rut, have me kill him, and claim self-defense," Hannibal murmurs. Will smiles. "And how do you propose to trigger this rut?"

Will hums. "I have my ways," he says. "Alphas are so eager to protect and defend."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side. "Jack is not your average Alpha."

Will shrugs one shoulder. "Worked on you," he says. When Hannibal frowns, he smiles and stands, and presses himself close to Hannibal. Hannibal embraces him instinctively, and Will leans in, but stops less than an inch before their lips were destined to touch.

He smiles. Then, his face changes, becoming wide-eyed and scared. His breath hitches and he lets out a soft whine and tucks his nose under Hannibal's jaw. "Please, Hannibal," he says. "You can mount me. O-or I can use my mouth." And he sounds just as frightened and unsure as he had been in the bathroom stall. "Mercy, Alpha, *please*."

Hannibal pulls away from him and Will hums, letting him go. He returns to his wine glass and Hannibal has to take a moment to decide whether he's angry or impressed with Will's performance. "You are a very devious creature," he says, and Will smiles. "It's a wonder I didn't see you for what you are."

"I think you just confirmed your own statement," Will says.

"Why do that at all?"

Will shrugs. "Call it an audition piece," he says with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I may be your equal, Doctor Lecter, but everyone has to prove themselves to their loved ones. And the world spins on, et cetera."

"And what must I do to prove myself to you, Will?"

Will smiles, and finishes his glass of wine. He stands and circles the kitchen island, presses his hands gently on Hannibal's chest, and leans up for a kiss. This time he follows through, pressing his lips chastely against Hannibal's, then deeper when Hannibal lets out a soft growl.

He scoops Will up and hauls him onto the kitchen island, pushing Will's thighs apart so that he can stand between them. Will huffs a short, breathless laugh, resting his forehead against

Hannibal's, his nails in Hannibal's shoulders.

"What happened to 'For sanitary reasons'?" he asks.

Hannibal growls and yanks him close by his hips, forcing Will to spread his legs farther apart. Will's eyelids flutter when Hannibal forces his erection to grind against Will's, the friction hot and damp behind their clothes.

"Circumstances have changed," he replies. The backs of his eyes feel hot when Will kisses him again, clawing at Hannibal's clothes – not tearing, but so obviously wanting to.

Will's eyes flash, and he smiles, his mouth red and eyes blisteringly gold. "I thought as much."

Will returns to work, and Hannibal returns to his practice. He finds his patients dull and tedious. Not even the ones that he would have previously toyed with to see what would happen provide him with any amusement. His thoughts are almost entirely on Will – he doesn't get to see Will during the day, now, and whenever he tries to ask about Will's comings and goings, Will is secretive and sly and tells him everything while telling him nothing at all.

He finds himself impatient during the day, eager to rush home at night to his mate. Will greets him every evening with a bottle of wine – sometimes red, sometimes white, always with a warm kiss that makes Hannibal forget, briefly, all the other irritations.

They speak about work – as much as they are able, when one side cites doctor-patient confidentiality and the other claims he can't give away details of a case. They exchange blows and laudations in equal measure. It feels like a Chess game without the pieces, where Will randomly decides the rules each day and as soon as Hannibal picks up the pattern, he changes them.

Will keeps his wine glass full and then, when their hunger is sated, they move to the study. They might play real games there, or listen to music, or curl up together on Hannibal's couch and simply breathe each other in. The times in the study are silent no matter where the conversation is when they move there.

Then, at a seemingly random time, dictated by some biological clock only Will can hear, he kisses Hannibal – deeply, passionately, with all the fervor of a man going off to war. And Hannibal answers in kind, incapable of resisting the siren song of Will's body, his slick, his sweet whines. Hannibal mounts him in the study, the kitchen, the dining room, his bedroom, the guest bedroom where Will's nest is growing steadily. Sometimes Will forces Hannibal to finish inside him without knotting. Sometimes he uses his mouth. Sometimes he begs Hannibal to stain his skin and mark him with it. He allows Hannibal to knot him once since their return and it feels like an incredible kindness, a concession on his part for some reason Hannibal doesn't understand.

They don't talk about Jack, or Alana, or Will's pending symphony. He prowls through each day and night, a wildcat and at the same time the hunter stalking it for its pelt. It seems like he's waiting for something.

Hannibal remembers Alana's words, that the Ripper was 'gearing up' for something, and he thinks of Will. He wonders what Will is waiting for.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Man y'all so suspicious after my other fic, you really think I'd give you Mizumono feels twice?

...Let's find out!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They catch the Angel-maker. Or rather, they find him. Castrated and strung up for everyone to see. When Hannibal regards it, he feels something akin to sorrow. In a past life, this might have been someone he counseled, someone he tried to change and evolve. Will seems strangely satisfied at the sight of the man, his jaw clenched and his hands deep in his pockets when Jack shakes his head and muffles a curse into his scarf.

"Disappointment," Will murmurs, when Hannibal drives him back home. Hannibal tilts his head to show he's listening. "That's what I feel. That's the word for this."

"Why disappointment?" Hannibal replies.

"This man had a wife, had children, and was a victim of his own brain defying him, decaying into his hands. And so he sought out God."

"Would you rather he sought traditional medicine?" Hannibal asks.

Will huffs a short, hissed-out laugh. "No," he replies, and curls up in the passenger seat. His eyes are on the road in front of them. "But I find it...lazy."

"'Lazy'," Hannibal repeats.

"What we do is an art, Doctor Lecter," Will murmurs. "We create for the sake of our legacy. Through offspring, or drawing, or writing – creators in this world are always so eagerly persecuted." He sighs. "I think of Picasso."

"Have I ever told you that you hop from lily pad to lily pad of conversation, and leave no room for the rest of us?" Hannibal asks.

Will smiles. "There's always room for you," he says, affectionate and quiet. "Remember that."

The curtains are drawn back, allowing a view of the sky as it lightens to a pale blue, highlighting the darkness of the clouds still remaining from last night's storm. Will is sweet and soft at his side, his head resting on Hannibal's arm, his back pressed tight to Hannibal's chest. Their fingers are interlaced and Hannibal knows Will is awake when he starts to toy with Hannibal's fingers, dragging his nails across his palm and wrist before taking his hand again.

He sighs, nuzzles Will's sweat-damp hair, and kisses the bite mark on the back of his neck. His eyes feel warm, his head hot. He's not sure if the red in his eyes is growing to be ever-present, just like Will's gold. Every time Will lets him close, spreads his legs and digs his nails into Hannibal's back or his bed, he feels pressure in his throat like he needs to bite and tear into Will. The urges come suddenly and strongly, ice on the surface of the water that is melted with Will's heat, or has salt thrown on it to force it away.

Will hums, lifting his neck to Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal sees his cheeks bulge in a smile. "Jack told me what you did with Bella," he says.

Hannibal presses his lips together and shifts his weight, head propped up higher on the pillows so he can see Will's hands. "I couldn't allow her to take her own life," he says. "It would have been...impolite."

"So you let them suffer instead," Will replies. Hannibal hums, and nods. "I appreciate the thinking behind it, but you shouldn't have done that."

Hannibal pauses, considering that. "Why?"

"It would have made Jack inconsolable," Will replies. "Eager to protect what he has left."

"You risk overplaying your hand, my dear," Hannibal murmurs.

Will sighs, and turns within the circle of Hannibal's arms. "I want to tell you everything," he confesses, his hands gentle on Hannibal's chest, curling in the thick patch of hair on his exposed skin. "But if I do, you won't react the right way."

"With one hand you show me your cards, and the other you hide an ace behind your back," Hannibal replies. Will meets his eyes, half-lidded and golden, and Hannibal cups his jaw and lifts his head so his neck is bared. "I'm wondering if anything you say or do contains this falsehood now."

Will smiles. "You can't fake some things," he replies. He takes Hannibal's hand and lays it on his neck, where his pulse is steady and slow. "I can't fake trust, or my love. Real love – the kind that allows us to transform into what we are always supposed to be. A twitch of the lip, a shaky breath, a flinch; it gives everything away. I can't fake what I feel for you."

And Hannibal wants to believe him. He kisses Will softly, and Will slides closer to him with a sweet moan. "I'm going to see Jack today," he murmurs, "and when I'm done, the music will start playing."

Hannibal's chest goes tight. "Tonight, then," he says.

Will smiles, bites his lower lip, and nods. He kisses Hannibal again and Hannibal growls when he smells Will's scent start to grow thick with arousal. Will presses himself close and spreads his legs when Hannibal rolls over him.

Hannibal drags his nails down Will's flanks, earning a soft gasp, a flutter of his dark lashes. "You must be brutal with me, today," he says.

Hannibal pulls back, resting their foreheads together. He frowns. "Why?"

"I must paint you as a savage man," Will murmurs, running his hands up Hannibal's back roughly.

"I don't enjoy the thought of treating you unkindly, Will," Hannibal replies.

Will smiles. "I know," he replies, soft and adoring. "If you won't do it, I can lay the marks myself, but having your scent on me will make it more convincing. Jack cannot look at what you've done to me and see your love, but your anger."

Hannibal pulls back, his eyes raking down Will's exposed chest and stomach. He thinks back to all the times his head felt hot and the desire to rip and conquer surged in him and, in a flint-strike of clarity, he sees what Will has been doing. Just as Hannibal cultivated and grew his mate's killer instinct, Will has been clawing at Hannibal's lizard brain in return, teasing and taunting it. He has been pricking Hannibal's brain, pulling him this way and that, sating his urge to mount but not his desire to knot and breed Will properly.

He tilts his head to one side. "Are you trying to trigger a rut in me, Will?"

Will smiles, and the expression is proud, like Hannibal has just figured out the rules to his game once again. He sits up and kisses Hannibal fiercely, and Hannibal meets him for it, unable to resist Will like he has always been unable to resist him.

"I am trying to trigger your evolution," Will murmurs into the kiss. He claws at Hannibal's back and lays back down, lifting his hips to grind his erection against Hannibal's bare stomach. "Your invincibility. Your rage."

"I've created a monster," Hannibal breathes. Will smiles and his eyelids flutter when Hannibal drags his nails down Will's chest, leaving painful red lines. He digs his nails into Will's flanks and they bite down hard enough to threaten breaking skin. "What a beautiful beast you are."

Will growls, baring his teeth, and leans up to suck a dark mark just shy of the mating bite on Hannibal's chest. It coaxes a snarl from Hannibal's chest, and he opens his jaws and bites down harshly on Will's throat. He sinks his teeth in until he tastes blood, until he feels the flesh give under his tongue. Will moans, trembling, his heart stuttering in pain as Hannibal's nails part his flesh in a similar way. He lifts Will's hips and Will's thighs tense, holding steady as Hannibal forces his cock inside of Will. Will isn't as slick as normal, the pain making his body tense and dry, but if Will wants Hannibal to be rough with him, to be 'brutal', Hannibal can certainly play the part.

Will's blood is thick in his mouth when Hannibal pulls back and forces Will into a kiss. Will whimpers, hands flat and gentle on Hannibal's shoulders, and lifts his thighs to wrap around Hannibal's waist and force him in deeper. He's slick enough that Hannibal isn't worried about tearing him, but if Will allows them to knot, it will definitely hurt.

Hannibal knows enough about his mate now to understand that this is by design.

"That's it," Will coaxes, and Hannibal wonders how he can sound so eager and steady when his scent is thick with pain and he flinches whenever Hannibal touches him. Hannibal shifts his hands to Will's thighs, pushes them up, holds him tight enough to bruise. "Yes. Just like that."

Hannibal's head is warm, his heart pounding as he fucks Will as brutally as he is able. The scent of blood and Will's slick is heavy in the room, arousal and pain and transformation and Hannibal knows this is as fitting a metaphor as they will ever create. Will has reduced him to a dumb beast, no more refined or cultured than the primitive things they evolved from, and Hannibal feels more and more exposed with every bruise he puts on Will's flesh, every soft whimper and moan he coaxes out, and every fresh gush of Will's blood and slick in equal measure.

Will tenses up, his ass getting tight and bearing down around Hannibal as he nears his release. Will puts a hand in his hair, fists tight, and kisses Hannibal and licks the blood from his jaws. "Knot me," he demands, and Hannibal feels a harsh tug behind his ribs when he hears Will's Voice. It is a command, plain and simple, an order Hannibal feels deep in his gut and sharp behind his teeth.

He can't disobey. He slams deep, grunting when Will's body spasms and he arches up, spilling hot and thick between their stomachs as Hannibal's knot swells and he finishes inside of Will. It's satisfaction, the deepest kind of placation. After so long without knotting Will, the relief of doing so threatens to completely overwhelm him. Will is purring, his chest heaving, and Hannibal bites him again and stifles his roar against Will's sweaty, bloody skin.

It's the roughest Hannibal has ever been with him. His hands shake as he touches Will, finding that there is no part of Will that is not slick with blood, or bruised. It's brutality, sinful and artistic in how it stains Will's skin. Red is the most perfect color for Will, Hannibal finds, when he pulls back from Will's neck and meets Will's eyes.

Will smiles, breathing hard, and his mouth is slick with blood, his eyes glowing gold. "Perfect," he murmurs, cupping Hannibal's jaw tenderly. He leans up for another kiss that feels like benediction. Hannibal's hands are warm with Will's blood and sweat. He clenches up around Hannibal's knot, coaxing another load of seed out of him, and Hannibal shivers.

When Hannibal's knot goes down, he kisses Will again, unable to resist the urge to drink another sweet drop of holy water from Will's mouth. Will sighs against him, stiff with pain but still so full of adoration. He touches Hannibal's neck and lets Hannibal caress him with soothing hands.

"I'll call you when Jack is on his way," he murmurs, and rises from the bed to shower and get dressed.

"Will," Hannibal says, and Will pauses close to the door. He looks over his shoulder and smiles at Hannibal and Hannibal feels something tight in his chest. He's not sure whether to call it hesitation or desire. "Do be careful."

Will's smile widens and he puts a hand on the doorframe. His fingers leave bloody imprints behind. "Don't you worry about me, Doctor Lecter," he says softly. "Jack would never be so brutal with me."

Hannibal watches him leave, and swallows harshly. Then, when the sound of the shower starts, he rises and gets dressed, washes his hands and face in the guest bathroom, and goes downstairs to prepare for tonight's dinner.

It has been a very long time since Hannibal felt something akin to nervousness. The last time he will admit to feeling something close to it had been his first session with Will, before all this began and long before Hannibal had even considered that they might become friends, or more. He senses, even back then, that Will had seen something dark and dangerous inside of him. He had spent so long navigating in the dark, prowling around within Will's shadow and out of Jack's flashlight beam, that he finds himself unsure what to do when the situation presents itself for him to stay still and let Jack find him.

Which is, he realizes, exactly what Will is forcing him to do. Will has him on a hook, and he's bobbing in the water, waiting for the fish to bite and swallow him whole so that Will can yank him out of the water to suffocate.

He cooks, but his mind is not on the meal. He wonders how long it would take for Brian, or Jimmy, or Beverly to remark on the raw bite on Will's neck. He wonders if Will, even now, is whimpering and scared in someone's office, teary-eyed and weak as all of his breed are stereotyped to be, confessing around hitched breaths and shaking fingers that his Alpha is a brute, a savage that lured Will into a pair bond and now intends to use and abuse him as he sees fit.

It makes something uncomfortable bristle in his head. Every time he catches his reflection, he sees red in his eyes.

He tries to think of Florence, think of how Will had looked when he'd left that morning, when he'd kissed Hannibal and asked for his trust one last time. How he'd put a hand on his own stomach and smiled with something like anticipation.

Will loves him. Will *needs* him. Hannibal clings to that and tries to accept his role as lure, to be patient and resist the urge to stalk and chase as his breed has so evolved to do.

The phone rings at five in the afternoon, and Hannibal answers it. "Yes?"

There's a moment of silence on the other line, and then Will's voice, shaky and quiet. "... Hannibal?" he whispers.

Hannibal closes his eyes, one hand braced on the kitchen counter as he feels a weakness that's something like relief wash over him. "Will," he breathes, white-knuckling his phone. He wants to ask if Will is alright, he wants to *see* his mate, but then Will makes another soft noise over the phone and Hannibal remains silent.

It sounds like a warning.

"Alpha," Will says, and Hannibal's eyes open again and he frowns. Will knows Hannibal's command not to call him that. *You will call me by name or nothing at all.* Another trigger-switch flickers in Hannibal's brain. Will must know that Hannibal doesn't like it when he calls him by his breed. Which means he's doing it for a reason. "Alpha, I'm sorry -. Please, don't be angry with me."

Hannibal swallows back his instinctive response. Will is trying to get him to say or do something specific. "Where are you?" he says, and makes his voice as demanding as possible. Will, for whatever reason, wanted him to play the brute today, and Hannibal can certainly do that. "Come home at once."

Will whines. "I -." Hannibal hears him shifting his weight, closes his eyes when Will lets out another soft, placative whine. It's weak, though. He's not using his Voice, and Hannibal wonders who else is in the room with him.

"Come *home*," Hannibal snarls. His fingers curl into a white-knuckled fist against the countertop.

"I had to leave," Will whispers. "I had to tell Jack...everything."

Hannibal growls. "Tell me where you are," he says, and lets some of his Voice slip into the words.

"I'm in Jack's office," Will replies suddenly, like he couldn't help confessing it. Jack must be listening. "Please, Alpha, I -. I beg for your mercy."

"You're lucky I don't make you cut your own throat," Hannibal growls, and hates how warm his head feels. His eyes are flickering red, he knows they are, and he knows Will let him get to this point. He clouded Hannibal's thoughts and filled his head with smoke and now Jack is *listening* on them and -. "Traitorous little whore."

He hears a soft curse – Jack's voice – and movement, and a door slam. "Jack, wait!" Will cries, sounding frantic and scared. "He'll kill you!"

There's a moment of silence, and then Will hums, sounding pleased. "Well played, my love," he says, and Hannibal can hear his smile. "The first string violin is on his way."

Hannibal takes a deep breath and closes his eyes again. "Are you safe?" he asks.

"Yes." He hears Will get up, and then Will lets out a soft curse. "He locked me in his office."

"I'll come get you."

"No," Will replies quickly. "I'll have Alana bring me. You have to be ready."

Then, he hangs up, and Hannibal stares at the phone in his hand for a long, long moment. He can't help feeling he entered into this symphony half-way through the performance, and now he's struggling to keep up.

Why would he bring Alana?

Unless Will knows that Hannibal might not make it out of this alive, or free. With clarity comes foresight, that's what he'd said. Hannibal sets the phone down and tries to think, but his head feels too hot and he doesn't *understand*.

He doesn't have a lot of time. Jack is on his way, probably with a SWAT team and backup. Unless he knows Hannibal is alone, unless he thinks Will placed him in this perfect spot, defenseless and with Will out of harm's way.

It's a perfect Chess setup. The Rook has cornered the Queen, and the Knight waits in the wings to close in on the Checkmate while the Queen is distracted elsewhere. Hannibal growls, straightening up and baring his teeth.

One way or another, Jack will have to die. Then, the rest of the pieces will fall where they may.

Jack comes into his home and Hannibal is ready for him. He draws his gun and Hannibal throws his cutting knife, spearing Jack's hand. He is reminded of the fight with Tobias – Jack is strong, and well-trained in combat, but Hannibal has been hunting men like him all of his life. Jack's eyes are red, his fangs bared, and he manages a few good blows with his bloody hand, the gun on the floor and then kicked into the cabinets.

Hannibal punches him, sending him staggering back, and kicks Jack square in the chest hard enough to dent the refrigerator door. He lunges for Jack and earns a punch to his jaw. Blood fills his mouth, and he spits it out onto the floor and wipes his lip with the back of his wrist. Jack makes a grab for his gun again but Hannibal hauls him back by the coat with a snarl, throwing another punch that sends Jack back into the cabinets.

Glasses break, another knife gets grabbed and lost as Jack stabs Hannibal in the shoulder. He snarls, ripping the knife out and slashing wildly, aiming for Jack's throat. Jack pulls back, growling and snarling, and they circle the kitchen island like two dogs around a scrap of meat.

"You know what he's doing, don't you?" Jack demands, his voice almost unrecognizable with the Alpha rumble sitting low in his throat. "He's playing us both."

Hannibal snarls. "If that's true, then why are you here?"

"Someone has to put an end to you," Jack replies. He grabs one of Hannibal's knives and lunges for him. Hannibal parries, grunting when Jack's weight slams him against the cabinets. He kicks at Jack's knee and slashes at his chest, catching his clothing and slicing it open but not deep enough to draw blood. Jack howls, and Hannibal hears the front door slam open.

"Will, wait!" It's Alana's voice.

"Hannibal!" Will's voice is frantic and loud. Hannibal can hear him rushing towards the kitchen. Jack is distracted, enough that Hannibal leaps for him and slams his knife deep into Jack's gut. He cuts savagely to the side and Jack chokes, his eyes wide. His blood is hot and sharp in Hannibal's nose.

Jack falls to his knees and Hannibal drops his knife, stepping up behind Jack and putting his hands on either side of Jack's face. He snaps Jack's head to one side, paralyzing him but not killing him, and Jack slumps against his legs as Will and Alana come into view in the doorway.

He raises his eyes and sees Will, wide-eyed and panting, leaning heavily against the doorframe. Alana is at his shoulder, pale with shock.

Will's eyes drop to Jack, and a flicker of a smile crosses his face, before it goes back to the scared mask he had been wearing before. "Alpha," he whispers, and raises his hands and steps into the kitchen. His fingers are trembling and he's letting out a soft whine that Hannibal knows Alana can't hear. "Please."

"You did this, Will," Hannibal growls. He puts a hand on Jack's head and jerks his body roughly. Jack's eyes are frozen open, his fingers twitching in the beginnings of death throes.

Will takes another step forward, and stops at the sound of a gun being cocked. He closes his eyes, sighing, shoulders sagging, and turns around to see Alana with a gun pointed straight at Hannibal's chest. Her hand is shaking, her jaw clenched.

Will sighs again. "Alana..."

"What the *fuck* is going on here?" she demands. Tears are gathering in the corners of her eyes, brightening them, held back by her fear and her anger. "Hannibal, what have you done?"

"Alana, don't," Will says, and raises a hand to her. She takes a step back, cups the handle of her gun with her other hand, and points it at Will. Hannibal snarls, *daring* her to harm his mate. Her eyes flash to him, wide with fear. "Alana -."

"What has he done to you?" she whispers, voice shaking. "How can you stand here and -?"

Will takes another step forward and she lifts her gun to his forehead, pressing her lips together. "Stop," she says. "Let's talk about this."

Will smiles. "There's nothing to talk about," he says. "There's a way this ends well for you. I don't want to hurt you."

"What are you *talking* about?"

"Be blind, Alana," Will says quietly. "Don't be brave."

He takes another step forward and Alana whines, and pulls the trigger. The gun clicks, and Will heaves another breath, a sad smile on his face.

"I took your bullets."

She gasps, her hands shaking, and Will swiftly grabs her wrist and twists it so she drops her gun. He tucks it into the back of his jeans, and then his eyes move to see Jack's gun on the floor. He walks over and takes it.

"Here's what happened," he says. "You came to have a dinner party with friends." He pulls back the barrel of Jack's gun, releasing the bullet, and ejects the magazine onto the kitchen counter. "When you arrived, an Alpha had come, in full rut, under the delusional belief that the Omega was being abused by his mate."

He lifts his eyes to Hannibal, and smiles. He unloads all but two bullets and puts them in his pocket, loading the gun again. "There was a struggle," he murmurs, and kneels down over Jack's body. Jack blinks at him as Will puts the gun back in his limp hand and curls Jack's fingers around the trigger.

"Will -." Hannibal can't get anything out, as Will fits his shoulder against the muzzle of the gun, grits his teeth, and forces the gun to shoot.

Alana flinches at the sound, the tears starting to fall. Will groans, sweating from the pain and the shock of the bullet. Hannibal can see the exit wound, small and bloody, and it makes him want to roar.

"The Omega got involved," Will breathes, shakily pushing himself to his feet. "He tried to defend his Alpha, even half-way into rut as he was." He takes the gun in his left hand and points it at Jack's chest. He shoots him in the lung, just shy of his heart. The sound is loud, echoing, and then Will hands the gun to Hannibal.

Hannibal takes it, wiping it clean, and Will takes a piece of shattered glass and kneels back down. He cups Jack's face, smiling, and then shoves the piece of glass into his throat hard enough that it will hide the fact that his neck was broken.

"The Omega got shot," Will whispers, and stands again. He looks pale and exhausted, bleeding heavily from the gunshot wound in his arm. He leans heavily on the kitchen counter and Hannibal lets Jack fall, deeming him irreparably injured. Will looks at him, wide-eyed and sweet, and smiles when Hannibal cups his jaw.

Then, he straightens, and turns back to Alana. "The Alpha, incensed by the harm done to his mate, killed the rutter in self-defense." He pauses, and then walks slowly over to her. He nods

towards the pantry and she follows his gaze. "Repeat it back to me."

"I – I hid in the pantry," Alana whispers, going to it as Will smiles and gestures for her to lead the way. "A rutter attacked my friends, and was killed in self-defense. That's all I know. I didn't come back out until the cops showed up."

"Good," Will whispers. He smiles at her and reaches out with his clean hand to cup her face. He kisses her forehead and steps back. "Fearing for their lives, the couple fled. You don't know where they went, or how to find them."

She presses her lips together and nods, her face a mask of anguish. "Oh, Will," she whispers, and reaches out to touch his uninjured shoulder. "What happened to you?"

Will smiles. "Someday I hope you find someone who does for you what Hannibal did for me."

"I don't think there's a word for what he did to you," she replies, bitter and angry and afraid.

Will looks over his shoulder and meets Hannibal's eyes. "I suppose not," he replies, affectionate and loving. He looks back at her. "Lock the door and wait for the police. Do not come after us, and we won't come after you."

She steps into the pantry and closes and locks the door. Hannibal sets Jack's gun down by his limp body, still bleeding onto the floor, but sluggishly now. His eyes are closed and he's barely breathing. He wraps Jack's hand around the gun, and rushes to Will's side. He cups Will's face and kisses him deeply, growling when Will flinches and makes a soft sound of pain.

He pulls back and Will huffs a laugh, his eyes on the mess of the kitchen. "How unsanitary," he says mildly.

Hannibal doesn't know whether he wants to laugh or snarl. "You certainly have a flair for the dramatic," he says instead, petting through Will's sweaty hair.

Will hums, smiling. "I learned from the best," he replies. He kisses Hannibal again and sucks in a sharp breath when his shoulder aches.

"You're injured."

"As are you," Will replies, nodding. "There will be time for that later. We must leave."

Hannibal nods, and leads the way to his bedroom where their suitcases are packed. He takes one and Will takes the other and they change quickly out of their bloody clothes, bind their wounds as quickly as they can, and head to Hannibal's car. The police will be on their way soon.

"There's an eleven o'clock flight out of D.C. to Athens," Will murmurs when Hannibal starts the car and peels away. "We can make it if we hurry."

Hannibal smiles, and reaches across the middle console to take Will's hand. Will's arm moves sluggishly, painful and stiff. Hannibal vows that when they're safely away, he will tend to his mate with the utmost care, see him flourishing and fine in the Italian sun, and wipe away all this ugliness once and for all.

"Do you think Alana will come after us?" Hannibal asks.

Will hums, then shakes his head. "No," he replies. "She might be a woman, but her instincts are just as strong. She'll do what she has to, to survive."

"A strange kinship we all share," Hannibal says. "Bound by blood, and organs, and death."

"The grunts and poetry of life," Will replies, smiling. He turns to look at Hannibal, sweet and adoring and fine, and Hannibal feels his head finally start to cool. Will squeezes his fingers gently. "I can't wait to see Florence. I want to see all of it, and taste all it has to offer."

"You will never want for anything," Hannibal murmurs, and lifts Will's knuckles to his mouth to kiss them gently. Will hums, smiling, and they settle into a companionable silence with soft violin music coming through the radio, out of Baltimore and towards D.C.

Chapter End Notes

And yes, I know getting shot in the shoulder is really super awful and Will is basically running on adrenaline but idk I feel if he and Hannibal can get into a full on blood fight with the Dragon after getting shot/stabbed/etc, he could do that.

See you guys in Florence!

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hannibal manages to remain calm through the drive, and the airport. Their haphazard bandages keep the blood from showing through their clothes, and Will covers them both with scent-deadening body spray to hide the fact that both of them are running off of pure adrenaline at this point. Hannibal knows both of their bodies are putting out distress scents heavily, seeking out comfort from a pack that isn't there to soothe their aches and tend to their wounds.

They check their bags and board the plane to Athens. No one follows them. Will spends most of the flight barely clinging to consciousness, his head on Hannibal's shoulder and their fingers interlaced so that, to the outside world, they look like any other happily mated pair. Occasionally Hannibal squeezes his fingers just to make sure Will is still aware, and smiles whenever Will brushes his thumb across Hannibal's bruised knuckles.

They make it to Athens, and hole up in a pretty hotel with a view of the Acropolis. They will spend the night here, and tend to their wounds while Hannibal makes arrangements for a more permanent stay in Florence.

Will is quiet for most of the journey, occasionally letting out small huffs and breaths to assure Hannibal that he's still aware, still functioning. But there's sweat darkening his hair and he looks pale and withdrawn by the end of it, and there are dark circles under his eyes.

Hannibal carries their bags to their room and sets them down and Will sits on the bed with a heavy sigh. Hannibal's shoulder stings, tender and sore, and the bruises Jack gave him ache terribly, but Will is far worse off than he is and he is desperate to tend to his mate and make sure he's going to be okay.

He kneels in front of Will, smiling when Will tries to shove at his hands as Hannibal unbuttons his shirt and works it off his shoulders. "Let me see," he says, and Will licks his lips and sighs, breathing steady but shallow through his mouth.

The gunshot wound is comparatively neat. Since it was fired point blank, the entry and exit wound are relatively small, but the bruising is deep and angry-looking, and spreads out along most of Will's chest and back. Hannibal's fingers shake, words like *hypoxia* and *disability* and *fragmentation* splitting his skull.

He stands and goes to the bathroom, wetting a small hand towel with warm water, and returns to his mate. Will lifts his head, low-lidded and tired, and gives him a weak smile. Hannibal peels back the wad of bandages that sits against the entry wound, sucking in an unsteady breath when more blood starts to leak out, sluggishly.

"Stay with me, darling," he murmurs, kneeling down again, and begins to clean the wound with delicate, light swipes of the cloth. Will hisses, tensing up and flinching when the action

makes pain ricochet down his spine. He bares his teeth and turns his face away, fingers on his good hand clenching.

The muscles are tender and warm under his touch as Hannibal wipes the blood away. He wishes he could have brought his surgical kit, but he hadn't expected Will to do anything this drastic. Will remains silent, submitting to Hannibal's need to clean and soothe him. When Hannibal is done, there's less blood coming out, but Hannibal can't help thinking that it's because Will's body simply is running out of blood to give.

Will turns his head and rests his sweaty forehead against Hannibal's, breathing in deeply. "I'll be alright," he murmurs. "You worry too much."

"You didn't have to do this to yourself," Hannibal murmurs, setting the cloth down and gently curling his fingers in Will's sweaty hair. He takes another deep breath when Will huffs, smiling.

"Had to make it look convincing," he replies softly, lifting his good arm to rest heavy on Hannibal's shoulder. They have mirror wounds – Hannibal's right shoulder stabbed, Will's left with the gunshot wound. "Had to show Alana I wasn't playing around."

"You convinced everyone in that room," Hannibal says. Will smiles again, closing his eyes and nuzzling Hannibal gently. "I have no doubt, in his final moments, that Jack saw both of us with extreme clarity."

"Then I did my job," Will replies. His fingers curl around Hannibal's nape and squeeze softly. "And so did you. I'm so proud of you."

The words hit something sharply in Hannibal's chest. He swallows, his eyes prickling but this time it's not red. He feels tears gathering, and doesn't want to let them fall, but then Will kisses him and his eyes close, and he can't help but let a few escape. Will hums, licking them from the corner of his mouth. He shushes Hannibal like he might a frantic child, pets through his hair, and pulls back.

"I need new bandages," he says.

Hannibal nods, grateful that Will is giving him something to do, to distract himself. He stands and finds a spare sheet in the linen closet, and rips a long strip from the edge. Will pulls his shirt from his arms, wincing and gritting his teeth, and then remains still as Hannibal binds his shoulder tightly. Will is going to be stiff and sore for a long time, but he will recover. He *has* to recover.

When it's done, he tends to his own wounds, finding that the stab was deep but not wide, so while he is sore and bruised, he isn't suffering from as much blood loss as Will. The bruises will fade, the cuts will heal and leave scars behind, and they will burn and rise from the ashes as Hannibal predetermined for them so long ago.

Will lies down on his good side, one hand on Hannibal's chest. Hannibal takes his hand and kisses his knuckles, and Will smiles.

"Tell me what happens next," he says.

Hannibal smiles, lacing their fingers together. "We go to Florence," he says, and Will hums. "I will make a place for us there, and we will fill it with children, and food, and sun ourselves on the Italian beaches. I will show you the art, the gold, and we will flourish there."

"That sounds wonderful," Will murmurs, and presses himself close to Hannibal's side, his eyes slipping shut.

Hannibal lives up to his word. He kills a man and his Omega and steals their names for himself and Will, so that they are Doctor and Mister Fell. He mounts Will in their marriage bed while the kitchen fills with the smell of cooking meat. He kills another Alpha and takes his job, and Will finds employment as an events manager for a large hotel near their home.

Three months into their new life, he refuses a glass of wine when Hannibal offers it to him. When Hannibal asks him why, his eyes glow and he smiles, and puts a hand on his stomach, and purrs loud enough that Hannibal is sure their neighbors hear.

That night, he takes Will to their bed, and the neighbors definitely hear Will howling for him. He touches Will with nothing short of reverence, vowing that he will never be brutal with his mate again. He kisses the claw marks on Will's hips, licks the gunshot wound in his shoulder, tenderly touches the bite mark on his neck. And Will answers him in kind, slick and needy as he has always been, and it feels like Hannibal has been given a gift from God for all of his mighty sins.

No one comes looking for them. No police, American or Italian, come knocking on their door to question them about the night in Baltimore. The news story, brief as it is, paints the image of a madman attacking them in the middle of the night, and them disappearing after the fact. No one knows where they went, no one knows where they are now. They're safe, and flourishing, just as Hannibal predicted.

The Chesapeake Ripper fades from the news, becomes a legend, a ghost story, and Hannibal lets it go.

Five years after that bloody, fateful night, Hannibal sees his dream realized. He has Will relaxed and fine on a beach towel amongst bright yellow sand. His sunglasses hide his eyes and protect them from the sun, and he has grown tan and beautiful under Hannibal's care. Of course, he was always beautiful, but the cuisine and the lifestyle has definitely suited him.

The scar in his shoulder matches the pretty, dark lines of stretch marks sitting on his hips and stomach.

Will cocks his head to one side, feeling Hannibal's eyes on him, and he smiles and lifts his glasses onto his head. "It's rude to stare," he says, teasing and playful.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows and hums. "Oh, dear," he says with mock horror. "However will you deal with my rudeness?"

Will huffs, eyes glowing. "Careful, Doctor Lecter," he replies, his voice low and rumbling. "I'd hate to have to eat you."

Hannibal laughs, and leans in to cup Will's face and kiss him deeply. Will hums against his mouth, smiling, a sweet moan pulled from his chest as Hannibal slides close to him on their towels and puts his free hand on Will's swollen stomach.

He pulls away when he hears a high-pitched shriek, and pulls back to see two young girls splashing at each other in the tide.

Will huffs, sitting up straighter. "Mischa, Shannon, be careful not to go too far into the water!" he calls to them, and they lift their heads at the sound of their names, waving at Will and Hannibal wildly. They both inherited Will's lovely eyes. Mischa has Hannibal's straighter, sandy hair, his sharp nose and Will's lips, and Shannon has Will's curls and Hannibal's jaw.

"They're alright," Hannibal says, but is careful to keep an eye on his daughters as well, lest they wade in too far. They are less than a year apart, proving another theory of Hannibal's: Will's body is so eager for him, so desperate to breed, that he'd gone into heat less than two months after Mischa had been born.

Will smiles and rubs his hand over his neck, before he reaches out and touches Hannibal's thigh. "Doctor Harrison ran tests today," he says, and Hannibal cocks his head to one side. Will's smile widens and he puts his free hand on his stomach. "This one's a boy."

"An Alpha?" Hannibal asks, and Will nods. Hannibal's purr is deep and satisfied, and he wraps Will in his arms and pulls him between his legs, Will's weight resting against his chest.

He puts his nose to Will's neck and breathes in deeply. His hand flattens over Will's on Will's stomach and he hears Will give an answering purr. "What shall we call him?"

Will hums and shrugs one shoulder.

"How about Jack?" Hannibal asks, and Will huffs.

"Not *Jack*," he says, voice heavy with distaste.

Hannibal grins. "Tobias?" he suggest.

"Lord have mercy," Will says, rubbing his free hand over his face, his sigh long-suffering.

"Franklyn, then," Hannibal says. "Or perhaps Alan. Dante. Patroclus?"

"Now I know you're teasing me," Will mutters, and turns his head to kiss Hannibal's jaw. "If it was another girl I'd insist on calling her Zama."

Hannibal laughs, squeezing Will gently. "Devious thing."

Will hums, still smiling. He gives it a moment of thought, then; "I like Michael."

Hannibal considers it. "Michael Fell," he says, rolling the name around on his tongue. "I feel like I should make an Old Testament joke."

"*Technically*, he would be Michael Lecter," Will replies. Then, his smile turns sly. "Or maybe we should call him Will. Then there'd be two of us in the world."

"Careful, darling, I don't think the sheep are ready for that," Hannibal says mildly. Will rolls his eyes.

Another shriek draws their attention, and Hannibal smiles as he sees his daughters running towards them. Will sits forward, smiling and wrapping his arms around Shannon as she throws herself into his arms.

Before Hannibal can warn her to be careful, Mischa comes up and flops at their side. "Careful!" she scolds, with all the seriousness a four-year-old can have. She tugs on Shannon's arm. "Mother's delicate!"

Will rolls his eyes and shoots Hannibal an accusing look. "Stop telling our children to be careful with me."

"You are all my most prized possessions," Hannibal replies, and scoops Mischa up into a loose hug. She giggles and Will moves to cradle their second born. "I would be remiss if I didn't try to protect you, even from yourselves."

Shannon giggles, nuzzling Will's shoulder as he hugs her and pets through her hair. "Alphas," Will murmurs, and they share a conspiring grin.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "And *I'm* not supposed to say anything?" he asks.

Will smiles at him, and leans over for a kiss. "Girls, what do you think of 'Michael' for a name?" he asks.

Mischa considers it for a moment, her face very much like her father for all its stoic demeanor. "I don't like it," she declares. "It's too close to my name."

Will laughs. "Well, what do *you* think would make a good name?"

Shannon smiles. "I like Jack."

"Oh, God!" Will says, overly-dramatic. "Betrayed by my own flesh and blood!" He grins at Shannon and she giggles, burying herself against Will's stomach. Will gives Hannibal another disapproving look. "You're a monster, my love."

Hannibal smiles, his chest warm and tight. Because even though it's said in jest, they both know it to be true, and Hannibal knows Will sees his darkness just as Hannibal can see Will's, and loves him for it. Not in spite of it.

"We have several months to decide," he says, and Will huffs and nods. "I'm sure we can decide on something, between the four of us."

Will smiles, and leans in for another kiss that Hannibal eagerly grants him. "That we do," he murmurs, joyful and soft. Then he straightens up and Shannon moves so that he can get to his feet. He holds his hand out to Hannibal, who takes it. "Let's go home. I'm starving."

Hannibal smiles. He has the heart and liver of a rude hotel customer Will told him about the week prior sitting in the pantry. He pulls Will close to him and kisses him again, deep and full of adoration, and Will answers him in kind.

A month later, when the girls are asleep, Hannibal and Will prowl the streets of Florence in search of their next meal. Will's hands are wet with blood and his eyes are bright by the end of it, and Hannibal doesn't think he could look any more beautiful.

"Congratulations, my dear," he says. "I think you might be the first Omega serial killer in the world."

"I thought it took three to make a serial killer," Will replies.

"Are you going to argue semantics with me?"

Will hums, laughing into a kiss. Then he bites his lower lip and flattens a slick hand over his stomach. "Let's call him Adam," he says, and Hannibal blinks. "The first man. The first to know sin, who gazed into the darkness of the world and leapt into it."

"Adam," Hannibal repeats, and then he smiles. "I like that."

Chapter End Notes

Ahh ending this story is like sending a child off to college. I'm so emotional and this was so fluffy at the end, I can't handle it. I hope you guys enjoyed the ride!

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